

TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A PRISON MINISTRY MODEL WITH AN EMPHASIS
ON RECOVERY FOR PRISONERS AND FAMILIES

"WHAT HAPPENS WHEN NOBODY COMES?"

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A FINAL DOCUMENT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
DAYTON, OHIO
May, 1996

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
ABSTRACT	ii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. AN INWARD JOURNEY	10
III. THE CONTEXT OF WHERE I DO MINISTRY	33
Matteson -- A Community Profile	34
Matteson--Demographics	
IV. THE SYNERGY PAPER	49
V. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION	56
VI. IMPLEMENTATION OF A MODEL	65
Developing Relationships	67
Angel-Tree Program	71
Cook County Jail	75
Unseating Sitting Ministers	77
My Dilemma	79
The Philemon Society	80
I Am Somebody, Because	84
Personal Stories	86
Sisters of the Yam	89
Community Service	92

Joliet Correctional Prison	93
After Care	94
Clothing Closet	95
Temporary Job Service	96
VII. EVALUATION OF MODEL	99
VIII. CONCLUSION	107
BIBLIOGRAPHY	111
SURVEY	114
APPENDIX	115
Graph 1	116
Graph 2	117
Graph 3	118
Graph 4	119
Graph 5	120
Graph 6	121
Graph 7	122
Graph 8	123
Graph 9	124
Graph 10	125
Graph 11	126
Positional Focus Sheet	127
Organizational Chart	129
Letter	130

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For Cheryl. . .whose love sustains me.

To enter a task as great as this requires a tremendous amount of support to keep soul and body together.

I want to thank my family. To Lora and Charles Curry, who shared their home with me and many nights encouraged my spirit. To Elaine Bundy, who received my collect phone calls when I was in distress and provided prayer cover for me when I was a resident in the "far country". To Harry Bloodsaw, who rescued me from the gates of the criminal justice system and never said "no" to me in my hour of need. To Crystal Conley, whose bright smile and helpful hands and feet kept oil in my lamp and my soul during this journey.

A special thanks to Rev. Vera Stewart, whom God has anointed and to Donnette Vaughn for typing my initial document.

I want to thank my friends. To Denise Reddick and Cynthia Lyle Rhodes, whose friendships strengthened me and provided a steady stream of encouragement. To Bernice Parham, who always answered my cry for help. To Cheryl Washington, who guided me through my first experience in serious writing. To Beverly Krisik, who typed my manuscript day and night and provided that creative touch. To Rev. Bill Watts of Prison Fellowship, Chicago, Illinois, who acted as my consultant.

Finally, thank you to Dr. Larry Welborn and Dr. Frank Thomas who guided and directed me in pursuing my dreams.

ABSTRACT

To Develop and Implement A Prison Ministry Model with an Emphasis on Recovery for Prisoners and Families

by

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This project was designed to address the needs of men and women who are incarcerated and their families. The project aimed to develop this model within the context of the church community in order to minister to the needs of the prisoners and their family members.

The learning experiences were framed by scripture, theology and by developing a network with church and community resource groups. The focus is upon the interaction of these groups with the intention of bringing them into the mainstream of congregational life. Results of this model were evaluated by qualitative and quantitative analysis within the context of the church community.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"WHAT HAPPENS WHEN NOBODY COMES?"

Dear Uncle Charles,

I know that this letter is 30 years overdue and you are very surprised to hear from me after all this time. Perhaps you thought we might be separated for all eternity, but it has taken this long for me to come to myself. You and I never saw each other, but I've heard stories about you. I feel that I know you in a way that is deeper than any photograph and beyond any physical images.

I remember as a boy you sent me a model ship and a dresser to Lainey. It must have really hurt you never to receive a response from us. I regret that we never had a chance to know each other as uncle and nephew, but I want you to understand something. When my mother spoke about you, I could see in her eyes a real pride in you and those glances hinted to us that you possessed some very good qualities. I know that doesn't matter to you now, but your memory will live on in the work that I do.

The question that will always be paramount in my mind is... "**what happens when nobody comes?**" I remember you and what I failed to do. When family and friends come to me in confusion and pain asking if they should forget about their loved ones in prison and go on with their lives, I shall remember you. I will tell them to gather together and hold hands; this will be better than a torch in helping

them find their way.

Your life was not in vain. Even though brothers and sisters continue to cry from the prisons of this country for "person-hood," I know that you had to develop some strong familial relationships in prison because we denied that to you. They probably seemed more like family than we did. I want you to know that I, your blood relative, through the unction of the Holy Spirit, will work to set the captives free. Finally, nothing can separate us from the love of God...not prison...nor time...or worlds to come. One day, we will see God face to face. Then we will know...

Love is stronger than death,

Richard

This study has a very profound and personal affect on me because my uncle, Charles Lyons, served a lifetime sentence for murder in the late 1940's. I knew him only through the limited stories that my family shared about him. There was a secrecy in the way they spoke about him, in hushed tones and regretful words that bespoke shame and guilt. There was guilt because most of the family stopped visiting him with the exception of my mother and maternal grandmother. In my youthful and simplistic mind, I must have put him in the category of an "evil" man. All the images of Black men who became violent and committed crimes for no apparent reason, had been reinforced by the violence I witnessed in my own

community, particularly against women. Since he was convicted of killing his common-law wife, it proved to be an open and shut case in my young psyche. **He must have been bad.** During my teenage years, my mother would return from a visit with gifts from her brother. Sometimes, they were arts and crafts that had been constructed with an exquisite touch and skill. I remember on one occasion, he sent a model ship which was a replica from the War of 1812. It was beautifully crafted. You could tell that tedious and time consuming work had been employed in order to construct such a masterpiece. A miniature dresser made for a dollhouse was sent to my sister. Although we were impressed with these gifts, we never wrote him to say "thank you."

It is painful to remember and feel, as an adult, the rejection that he must have felt. He was reaching out to us, his sister's children, and we did nothing to affirm his very existence. I remember my mother encouraging us to write him. She never pushed us to do so, fearing my father would create an argument and warn us never to emulate him. It must have been very painful for my mother, unable to affirm her own brother, even in casual conversation. I shall never forget my mother periodically sharing stories of her visits with uncle Charles. She told us about his reflections on the incident, the one that put him in prison, over and over again. "I wish to God that I could have been strong enough to leave before it happened. Nobody is worth all of this." Self-control still continues to ring and reverberate in my brain even to this day. It has been almost 30 years since his death. I understand so much more about the complexity of life than that simplistic boy who so easily

formed opinions about good and evil.

I remember reading T.S. Eliot's work, Little Gidding. He shed a rich light upon my feelings and observations on life. Eliot felt that when we go far away from home, we always return to the place where we started.

I have done a tremendous amount of work on myself, in order to enable myself, to return "home." This journey involved many late night long distance phone calls to friends and relatives in an effort to piece together our collective memories. I wanted to know the exact date that my uncle died, where he was laid to rest and whether or not any of our relatives were present at his funeral. This experience has provided rich new insights into my family of origin. Much healing has taken place in this endeavor and most important, it has reconciled us on a deeper level by shining the light of forgiveness into the closet of family secrecy. It has released a vibrant life force that was denied us for so long and has created spaces of reconciliation in us.

One of the areas in which the African-American church should bow its head in shame, is the issue of brothers and sisters in jail. The church has deserted these brothers and sisters. Many African-American church congregations fail to acknowledge our present condition as it relates to them. This self-imposed denial has allowed the politics of domination to invade the sacred space of the Kingdom of God. One reason the vast majority of African-American churches fail to act is that the image of "us and them" continues to operate on a subliminal plane. The church plays an ambiguous role in the formation of the self. It nurtures, but it also provides

a religious justification for the false (masked) self. I believe there is an authentic self which is given by God. The self is made for community with God and others, but the true self is masked by class, race and culture. This mask creates a false consciousness of "us and them," the free and the incarcerated, which is destructive of community. My project is based upon the premise that prison ministry will unmask this false self and restore the community. Also, racism has made such an incredible mark. To resist this internalized injustice and hold on to each other despite conflict and differences is unthinkable in the context of church congregational life. Many of us believe that brothers and sisters who break the law get just what they deserve. I believe that our God is big enough to transcend the differences that we experience as a people. To put it simply, we as Christians must be willing to take a risk.

The church must be wherever suffering people are and be able to allow the shed blood of Christ to redeem and bring about reconciliation among mankind. Transformation and redemption are possible only when we are present on the "battlefield of the Lord." The spirit of the Lord rests with those who are concerned about bringing unity and vitality to our communities. If the church is to fulfill its mission of being a light in the world, it must go to places where no one else wants to go and minister to people that no one else wants to bother with. Christ makes His invitation new by the insistence that His church be a standard bearer to all those whose despair and broken spirits seems insurmountable. Thus, the spirit of God falls upon every creature whose humanity has been assaulted and God becomes a

redeemer who lifts, transforms and restores that which was lost.

The Word reconciles us to the original plan that God has for each of our lives. This reconciliation can only be achieved when we, the church, shine our light into the dark places of this world and lay our net of salvation at the very mouth of hell. It is the task of the church to enter into the "belly of the dragon" to retrieve that which was lost and bring it home. Jesus has instructed all of his disciples to follow him with courage and faith and to walk into newness of life. The church cannot just sit idly by, singing our hymns and passing out Bible tracts while the whole world goes to hell.

When I reflect on the life of the historical Jesus throughout the gospels, he always seemed to show up at the address of those who were alienated or ostracized. The actions of his life transcended divisions and allowed mankind to experience his divinity without regard to social status or economic class. In fact, Jesus seemed to gravitate to the poor and disenfranchised people. He interacted with the "throw-aways" of society. He turned his back on the conventional societal rules of "us and them." He was rejected by the religious community as a heretic and criminal because of his interactions with those who were different. He walked with those with whom society said He shouldn't walk. He ate with those with whom society said He shouldn't be involved. Through the life of Jesus, the church has been given the mandate to heal the sick, encourage those who have lost hope and touch those persons no one wants to touch. We must learn to create spaces of reconciliation and forgiveness so we can let go of past hurt, fear and shame. We must walk

towards each other with openness. It is only in the act and practice of loving one another that we are able to experience true community.

For decades, sociologists and psychologists have given the reasons and explanations why people commit crimes and go to jail. Many of those explanations are quite plausible as they relate to the issues of economics and environment. Many people do come from deprived economic situations and abusive family environments. On the other hand, many also come from families that have been involved in the church since their youth. Some of these offenders have established a real belief in God as their Savior, but not as the Lord of their lives. These people sang in the youth choirs and were sons and daughters of distinguished church members. When I began the process of learning who these people actually were, I collected stories and conducted interviews with inmates and ex-inmates in county, state and federal institutions. I discovered that these people were our children and family members. They lived next door and you cared for them when they were young. They were the people who acted in the Easter and Christmas programs at church. They were the children who lived in our community and never seemed to have clothing to wear to school. These children came over to your house after school and never seemed to want to go home. These were the ones your parents constantly asked you about and discovered that they practically raised themselves. These were the ones who never seemed to have a curfew or rules that most kids had when they were growing up. You would always see them standing in front of a store or house with others like themselves.

While growing up in a predominately Black community, I realized that there were consequences to "crossing the line" and that certain behaviors might result in jail or death. Many times, however, most of us did venture too far across the line. All of us at one time or another did break the law, but it only mattered if and when you got caught. Secrecy played a huge part in this "rite of passage." After all, if you were a man, you had to be "Bad." Machismo or Juice had to be displayed like a badge of courage to let people know that you were not to be "messed" with. Those who were caught by the police made a pact with their street brothers to never confess, never turn in your brothers and never allow yourself to feel the pain.

The issue of prison ministry has had a powerful impact on me. Professionally, I have always been assigned to middle-class Black churches that have considered, to some degree, the incarcerated as invisible. They were not to be discussed except as a consequence of what happens when you transgress God's law. This attitude always seemed to me to be a superficial and unrealistic way of looking at people. After all, I rationalized, there are many in the congregation of faith who are there participating in the sacraments of the church by the mere grace of God. They just didn't happen to get caught! Many were able to avoid slipping through the cracks of humiliation and punishment because they had a support system that gave them time to adjust to life's injustices. Furthermore, I believe in the redemption of a person's life through Christ. In my own family and community, there were individuals who "served time" for various offenses. Yet, they were endeared to the community because we knew another side of them. It is wrong to condemn

individuals to serve in the marginal space of our society without the possibility of ever coming "home." I believe that "home" space can be experienced and lived through the African-American church.

CHAPTER II

AN "INWARD JOURNEY"

I have discovered in my own life the forces which result from the incarceration of African-American males. My story is one of immense struggle which is not foreign to most African-Americans who live in the urban cities across America.

During the late 1940's, Americans were returning from WWII in Europe. The pulse of the country was jubilant because they had, after all, become victors. Much of what Americans espoused to be "virtuous" was demonstrated in that war. Americans had confronted and destroyed the powerful forces of Hitler and Aryan superiority. God was on the side of America. Ticket-tape parades honored the fighting men and women who manned the war machines at home and abroad.

One major benefit from the war was the growth of industry at home. Jobs were plentiful and the standard of living rose in America. That feeling of triumph shook the whole country, from the agricultural southern cotton fields of Alabama to the manufacturing state of Pennsylvania.

At this special time in America, a renaissance of the spirit took place. Americans believed that prosperity was just around the corner. Much of that spirit was captured by composers such as Cole Porter who produced works like, "Summertime...and the living is easy...fish are jumping and the cotton is high." Hollywood, through its motion picture industry, emphasized the value of hard work

and the Horatio Alger ideal of prosperity. Joe Louis was still the heavyweight champion of the world, but his career was in decline. Judy Garland, Mickey Rooney, Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson were box office favorites.

It was within the context of these events that I was born. Like many African-Americans in the diaspora of the South to the North in the 1940's and 1950's, my parents migrated from Georgia and Virginia seeking a better way of life. The feeling in the Black community at that time was, if you could get North, you could make a life for yourself in the factories. Southern Blacks believed that in the North, they would no longer have to face the overt racial discrimination, lynching and killings that had become a way of life in Mississippi and Alabama.

My earliest childhood recollection was of being in a community of people who worked, laughed, cried, loved, dreamed, sang, celebrated and died together. Everyone seemed to be members of my family. Cousins and nieces seemed like brothers and sisters. Older men and women were referred to as Uncle or Aunt as a term of endearment.

Apart from that social structure were my mother and father who stood head and shoulders above the rest. I held my mother in such high esteem and love that I honored her every request and was glad to do whatever she told me to do. My mother was well respected within our community because she had a formal education and carried herself well. She knew how to complete documents that the White community required for various tasks such as income tax forms and job applications. Also, she was a beautiful woman. Everyone always remarked how she

never tried to carry a high profile, but always worked in a quiet fashion to help others who needed it.

Cooperation and help were very important to those who traveled North. Things were different and it took awhile to adjust to the new routine. The factories required their employees to be on time and sometimes work in one place for hours. This was a far cry from being in the fields where one could alternate and change his environment from time to time. However, this new life had trade-offs that affected our family. My father would be gone for long periods of time during the week. Along with other men of the community, my father would stay in shanty towns. These were primarily wooden shacks with tin roofs where workers would live during the week and return home late on Saturday night. My family, along with others, would wait for the men to return home.

Nevertheless, this was a time for celebration in our community. The men brought home wages to provide for their families. It was also a time for my family, immediate and extended, to engage in story-telling. The stories focused on the heroic exploits of some of the men who accomplished feats of strength or skill on their jobs. Others told about the way their White bosses had abused them. I can remember that I couldn't wait to be a man so I could go to work in the factories. It was my intention to see what life was like beyond the town where I lived. I believe this curiosity about life in other places formed early when my father and others talked about what different countries were like when they served in the armed forces. My grandparents talked about "Down South" like it was another country. I

dreamed about traveling someday even though I knew it meant leaving my family. That thought was always very painful for me to entertain. Anyway, I knew that one day, I would have to find out for myself.

My mother taught me to read at a very early age. She often read Bible stories to me. I loved to memorize those stories and repeat them to my parents because they would always reward me for remembering them. On the other hand, Sundays at church made little sense to me except for Sunday School. Most of us had to stay in church all day on Sundays. People in my family, especially my grandmother, seemed to change during the services and take on new personalities. The congregation would dance and shout and sometimes weep and cry until they passed out. It use to frighten me when they talked about the Holy Ghost. Sometimes when I returned home, I found it hard to sleep. My mother always seemed to understand my fears. She brought comfort and eventually peace where there had been anxiety. At one of the services, all the youth in the church were asked to come to the altar to receive the Holy Ghost. We had to kneel at the altar and call on the name of Jesus. As evidence of receiving the Holy Ghost, one had to speak in tongues and begin dancing in the Spirit.

I remember wanting to receive the Holy Ghost that night because I wanted the affirmation of all those church folk, some of whom were my relatives. That night as I closed my eyes and called on Jesus, nothing happened. I was afraid to open my eyes. I could hear my friends and cousins start to speak in other tongues as the congregation exploded with applause and affirmation. In the deepest recesses of my

soul, I wanted Jesus to touch me too. Sweat poured off my forehead and I was soaking wet. Still on my knees and my voice hoarse, two old ladies chastened me to "**call on Him**". Finally in what seemed like hours, the rhythm died down and there was almost total silence in the church. There I was, alone, just me!

I turned around and my eyes looked directly into my mother's eyes. With all the other eyes focused on me, her eyes were the only ones that mattered. Her gaze searched deeply into my soul communicating to me that she understood my pain and somehow, it was okay. No matter what others said and thought, I was still her son and if necessary, she would confront heaven and hell to protect me. I sensed a mother's love that night which eased my fear at the altar. I wanted to run to her and bury my head in her lap and escape from the world. There was something, however, in her glance that told me to walk with my head up. I fought back the tears as I took my seat next to her. The minister, sensing my pain, said that it was okay because God would move me in His own time.

That night as I walked home with my mother, neither one of us spoke a word. She held my hand in a way that made me feel that somehow it was going to be alright. The next day, I talked with my two older cousins who were at the altar with me. They could hardly contain their laughter about the incident. They explained to me, they had faked it!

In retrospect, this incident had a profound effect upon me. It demonstrated that one could "get over" by merely faking it in life's interactions. Over the years this revelation caused me and others I came into contact with tremendous pain and grief.

I am sure this incident provided reinforcement for the mask that I would wear in years to come. The struggle to be real in life's encounters was balanced by the realism I observed and experienced within my family unit. Many aspects of minority working-class families actually forbade being anything but real. The day to day mundane tasks of just making a living were all too real. The long hours at work, the needs of the family to receive food, clothing and sustenance were things that couldn't be faked. The toil, work and sacrifice that drove many to an early grave, were all too real. I witnessed the stark reality of suffering and death through an exclusive and oppressive system. This awareness kept me true to my convictions.

By the time I became a teenager, I was a walking paradox. This battle raged strongly within me for many years, especially in my relationships with women. Romantic relationships always seemed to be more successful when I wore the mask. Under the guise, I didn't have to risk rejection. Things became very confusing to me. At times, I didn't know whether I was depicting the deepest expressions of my soul or merely expressing the mechanics of my game. As time went on, I longed for something that was real. I had met the enemy...and it was me. It was me who was in need of prayer...not my brother, my sister or my uncle...it was me. It was at this point that I sought answers to my dilemma from my father. Until this time, I was still under the strong influence of my mother because my father was absent most of the time. However, on weekends he took me fishing in the bay of the Atlantic ocean. I loved nature and enjoyed being on the boats that left the piers early in the morning. In the evenings, they returned with a full cache of fish and crabs that were

destined to be cooked and eaten by my family and neighbors.

The times I enjoyed the most were when my entire family would be together, especially on crabbing expeditions. We formed a convoy of autos consisting of my uncles, aunts and cousins. These were grand times for me. It provided long daily trips away from home and the chance to see what life was like away from home.

My father loved the ocean and was very knowledgeable about the various types of sea life with which we came into contact. He would always warn us about the dangers of making contact with the fins of certain fish when taking them off the fishing line. He was happiest with a fishing pole in one hand and a sandwich in the other. My fondest memory centers around him standing in the crashing surf with his Dodgers' baseball cap pulled firmly down on his head and an intense determination to stand at all costs.

As I became older and acquainted with the literature of Hemingway and his book, The Old Man and the Sea, I saw many similarities that parallel my life with my father. For instance, much of my time was spent with him telling me stories that had to do with moralization and hope for the future. He was insistent on driving home the idea that if you worked hard and treated people fairly, you would succeed in life. He admonished me never to take advantage of those who were weak and old, but to always stand firmly against those who did seek to take advantage. I didn't realize it then, but he was planting the seeds that would later blossom into a support system that would see me through difficult times that lay ahead.

I never saw my father fear anything. He seemed to have good will towards

anyone who was trying to better himself. He had little patience for those who wasted time. I enjoyed spending time with him because each weekend was a new adventure. While in school, I could hardly wait for Saturday. I would daydream about what we were going to do next. The closeness with my father gradually caused a rift with my mother. She felt that he was influencing me too much with the idea of individualism. She tried to cultivate in me a sensitivity toward the group mentality. My father always emphasized standing up for what was right even if it meant standing alone. Mom always pushed compromise. Eventually, I separated myself emotionally from both of them. I sought independence in making my own decisions. Later, I discovered they were both right and they had both given me survival tools. The lens through which I was to view life had its genesis with my family.

Up until this time, life for me was like Camelot. I had a very privileged childhood. I went to high school and distinguished myself as an athlete and a scholar. Early in life, I had developed a love affair with books, particularly history. Somehow, it seemed to jive with the oral traditions that were prevalent in my family. My great maternal grandmother lived to be over 100 years old and I was the recipient of some very rich folk tales. I loved to hear those stories and repeat them to others. It never occurred to me to write them down because they didn't seem to have any worth aside from the daydreaming of a child.

Young Black men were encouraged to learn a trade, work with their hands and make a living. Booker T. Washington had made his impact upon my parents'

generation. Books were okay as long as you didn't take it too far. One didn't have the luxury of time to spend contemplating the nature of the universe when the hell-hounds of survival were barking at your heels.

Fortunately, I received an athletic scholarship to Central State University in Wilberforce, Ohio. This was a turning point in my life and things would never be the same. During the first week of orientation, all the new freshmen students were to attend a convocation with the president of the college. No one knew what a convocation was. I assumed it was something like church. Reluctantly, I attended and heard Dr. Charles Wesley speak about the reason we were there, our responsibilities to ourselves and our race and the rich heritage from which we came. He spoke as if he knew my grandmother and my innermost personal struggles which I had not shared with anyone. It was as if he was speaking directly to me. I had never heard a Black man speak with so much power and dignity. The entire audience was mesmerized and you could have heard a pin drop in the auditorium. I waited for his every word which made an imprint on my brain and my soul. Like John Wesley, I felt my heart strangely warmed. He told us that it was no mere coincidence that we were there; we had been selected by God to be the standard bearers for the Black race. We were the cream-of-the-crop, the talented tenth, who would lead our people to the promised land. I left that day feeling I had a date with destiny.

I became immersed in studies and was rewarded with finding rich insights and new worlds being born within me. I drank deeply from the works of Jean Paul

Sartre, Albert Camus, Thoreau Whitehead and other western philosophers. More importantly, I was exposed to W.E.B. DuBois, Henry Highland Garnet, Carter G. Woodson, Howard Thurman and other prolific writers about the Black experience.

The synthesis of these different schools of thought was difficult for me to ascertain. I had completely rejected Arnold Toynbee's interpretation of world civilization. This led me to a new group of historians called "Revisionists". This group maintained that history had been manipulated by the majority population and sought to preserve the status quo. Later, I developed a dialectical view of history and leaned toward Marxism. Mao's Red Book became my constant traveling companion. This became my life and I received constant reinforcement from my fellow students who majored in political science and history. I became as philosopher Eric Hoffer stated, "a true believer." I was prepared to lay my body in front of the machine. This was the time of the modern Civil Rights era. The march on Washington led by Dr. King had passed and we were in full swing with civil rights demonstrations across the country.

Periodically, I would have to separate myself from civil rights activities. I was there on an athletic scholarship to run track and I was responsible for my bills. I came to college with the intention of making the Olympic team, but my focus started to change. Even though I had attained national recognition and had run on every major track in the country, the willingness to sacrifice for the training regime just wasn't prevalent anymore. I went home that summer after my third year and became involved in community voter registration drives in the south. When

September arrived, I hadn't earned enough money to return to college. My dilemma was to either return to school and resume my athletic goals or do as the poet Robert Frost described, "take the road less traveled." I chose the latter. My folks thought I was stark raving mad, but I moved to Newark, New Jersey and took a job with Ford Motor Company. My idea was to earn enough money to return to college the following year. During this time, I supported myself and largely distanced myself from my parents even though I loved them dearly. I began to call my own shots and make my own decisions. I truly believe they were proud of this new independence I established. These things lasted about a year before I received an induction notice and was drafted into the Army. I spent the next two years stationed outside Paris, France. I traveled extensively throughout Europe and discovered that the Algerians were considered the "Niggers of Europe." I became empathic and began to see the systematic oppression of people of color all over the world.

This experience motivated me to read, Wretched of the Earth, by Frantz Fanon. I became militant in my views toward the majority culture. I was convinced that liberation came from the barrel of a shotgun and that freedom could only be achieved "by any means necessary." This led to my involvement in the Black Panther Party.

I received my discharge and returned to civilian life. My immediate priority was employment even though I was still a man on a mission. I took evening classes in biology and chemistry at Rutgers University. I received an emergency teaching certificate and taught high school biology for two years. Later, I moved and began

to work for a major chemical company as an analyst. It was at this time that I met the love of my life, Arnora Johnson. Prior to meeting her, I had numerous affairs and flings which resulted in nothing but physical gratification. She was an English major who had a love and passion for literature. We talked and discussed social issues for hours. She captured my heart almost immediately. There was something about her spirit that gave me contentment and happiness when we were together. Arnora Johnson became my wife. Even with this new found joy, my personal life was still marked by depth and isolation. I found it extremely difficult to discover self. Other people's burdens were unending. I reached a point where I wanted to stand alone, even if it meant drinking from the bitter springs of isolation. I wanted to devise my own plan for life that didn't involve taking care of other people. In my marriage, I always put my needs last and I wore the mask that hid my true feelings. When people asked me how I felt, my reply was positive even when I felt negative. I smiled and nodded appropriately, never wanting to displease anyone. I believe this contributed to the break-up of my 13 year marriage.

As I journeyed on in my quest to discover self, I resorted to the use of drugs and alcohol which ultimately destroyed my life. Communication between Arnora and I was strained. I felt confused and hurt. I began to use the resources of our livelihood to sustain my addiction. Eventually, she could no longer tolerate my behavior and left me. I lost everything in my life that mattered to me--my family, house, job and self respect. My family moved to Cleveland, Ohio which was a long way from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I was alone and all I had left was a willingness

to do whatever it took to survive this bitter experience.

During this time, every conscious moment of my life was filled with pain. I descended into the subculture of urban ghetto life. This was a new experience for me in more ways than I could have ever imagined. I had previously lived in a beautiful four bedroom colonial home in an exclusive community. Now, I had to adjust to living a transit existence, sometimes week to week. I hustled and tried to survive in a violent world. I slept in parks and on street benches, always choosing areas that were far from the maddening crowds. I drank wine and smoked dope daily to dull the pain of my existence. The guilt of having caused the destruction of my family bore heavily upon me. In my more lucid moments, I tried to develop a strategy that would put my life back together. The pain of those brief moments caused me to be suicidal. I really didn't want to go on with my life. I severed all of my family ties because of the shame and deep resentments I felt.

The thing I remember most about that period was the noise. It seemed that no one went to bed at night. There was always activity into the early morning hours. I can remember laying awake at night thinking and lamenting the loss of my wife and children. I felt abandoned. Denial of my addiction prevented me from seeing that the problem was me. I was trapped in a world where only the strong survive. From time to time, especially holidays, I would call Arnora. She never wanted to talk to me. As a consequence, I began to play mind games with myself. For example, I would have enough money for food and a room for the night, but I would call long distance just to hear her voice. She would hang up the phone and I would feel

crushed. The game was called martyrdom. I felt that this demonstrated my love for her through my sacrifice. Ultimately, I spent the night on the street hungry.

One particularly cold night in December, I walked into a shelter on North Broad Street to spend the night. Prior to that, I only went in shelters to eat. When I got to the basement where the men slept, I couldn't believe my eyes. The characters looked like they had just stepped out of a Russian prison novel. The smell of unclean bodies and vomit drove me from the place. Had I really sunk to this level of degradation? As I went out into the night air, I felt relieved just to be out of that place. It was at that point, I began to hear voices from the past. These were the voices of my ancestors that told me never to give up. I had everything inside of me to make it through this ordeal. I began to remember the stories they told me about the rough times they experienced and how they had endured by calling on the Lord. I was relieved that my mother was dead so that she couldn't see me. I felt if she knew how I had turned out, it would break her heart. Somehow, that night I felt a strange source of power that made me divorce myself from the pity I had been feeling.

As I walked along, I found a newspaper and put it under my clothing to try and stay warm, but the wind and the cold became too much for me. I walked to the business district in town and I threw a brick through the window of a clothing store. The alarm went off and I just stayed there until the police came and arrested me. To my surprise, the policemen were sympathetic. They understood that I wasn't trying to rob the store, but merely trying to get out of the elements.

This was the first time I had been in the county jail for criminal behavior. I had been there during the civil rights marches, but this was different. I knew enough about survival not to talk about my problems or mix freely with the other inmates. I was always cautioned about accepting things from people. At first, I didn't have any problems. Physically, I knew I could handle myself because I had trained in martial arts for seven years. Things didn't happen the way I thought. I was jumped by two muscular men who outweighed me by at least 50 pounds each. I discovered my coordination and power had been weakened by drugs and drinking. I fought with such heart and courage that both men stopped and embraced me with respect. I had learned from my environment that one had to always be vigilant and take nothing for granted.

I stayed in the county jail for three days and was released because it was overcrowded. I was relieved to be out and about. My "blue period" lasted about two years. I would return to jail five or six times during this period. The duration of my confinements varied from six to seven days and were mostly for fighting to protect myself. The nature of everyday street life became so violent that you didn't have to bother anyone to run into trouble--all you had to do was be there.

The community in which I lived had a church on practically every corner. Many of these churches practiced an interesting form of Christianity--controlling the congregational members. Sometimes I would go and sit in the back of one of these churches. The preacher would preach sermons about giving everything to the church and God would provide. It angered me to see women "cash" their welfare

checks at the church while the ministers rode around in luxury cars and sported the latest in jewelry and designer clothes. Some of these churches rocked late into the evening with shouting and dancing in the Spirit while the whole community was going to hell. Some sold candles and prayer cloths along with the sacred heart of Jesus. It was always for profit and I knew that they lied when they said, "I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold."

I developed a strong resentment against the church. I knew there was little difference between the ministers who inhabited these store front churches and the men who sold drugs on the corner. Karl Marx's statement about religion being the opiate of the people took on a new humorous meaning for me. After all, here I was in the belly of the dragon where every other word consisted of "f _ _ _" this and "f _ _ _" that, yet I was quoting Marx and Engels. I learned to laugh at myself.

Eventually, I found some brothers and sisters who thought and felt the same way I did. They were largely the wounded from the Civil Rights era (those who never made it back to the mainstream . . . writers, poets and revolutionists who still held on to ideas of yesterday). I loved them for their beauty. They possessed love for people of color, but I had to leave them. I had one pressing concern in my mind and that was to get my family back together. I had five daughters and two sons. I was a man on a mission. Every time I visited my children, I could tell that my wife and her relatives had begun to turn them against me. I had made my bed and now I had to lie in it. Once I hitchhiked from Philadelphia to Cleveland to visit my children. When I arrived, I was told they were on vacation. I remember feeling very

discouraged and I began the long hike back to the east coast. I received rides all the way to West Virginia and then was stranded for two days. On the third day, I was so weak and cold that I didn't think I was going to make it. Trucks and cars passed by. This was a remote section and it was very difficult to get a ride. I began to talk to God in a conversational voice explaining that I didn't think I could make it home unless he helped me. I was weak and lost. Moments after I prayed, a large truck stopped and picked me up. The driver told me not to say a word. He began to tell me that God had heard my prayer and had sent him to rescue me. I was amazed that this man used the same words that I had used in prayer. For 500 miles, we talked about God--a God who could reclaim and redeem lives. When I arrived home, something had changed within me. It was at this point that I entered a residential drug and alcohol treatment program for 30 days. It was the longest period that I had gone without drugs and alcohol. I felt reborn with a new purpose and desire to make something of my life. It also marked the first time I had been in group therapy. The feeling of community in that group helped me tremendously. The trials and tribulations I had experienced had given me a teachable spirit. I was agreeable to most things that my counselor suggested except one; I should stop thinking that I could get my family back. He told me to start a new life and take it one day at a time. I had always believed that marriage was, until death. He explained to me that marriages die just like people do. That thought had never occurred to me before now. Anyway, I left Seabrook House a different man.

I immediately went to work at a meat processing plant for minimum wage. I

was glad to have the opportunity to get away from the hustling life. I attended AA meetings after work and developed a schedule that was comfortable for me. I spent my evenings at the University of Pennsylvania library reading newspapers and magazines. Sometimes, I sat in the courtyard and thought about how I could make amends with my family.

It was at this time, I met Janine. She played a very important role in my life. She was very community conscious and was always doing something in the "hood" to benefit people. Through my relationship with her, tremendous healing took place in my life. My love for her led me back to a feeling of being connected to family and I began to operate from a strong base of decency. It's interesting to note that I met her in a blood bank during the Christmas holidays. She was a nurse at a near-by hospital and was filling in at the blood bank on a part-time basis. I was selling my blood to get a recorder out of the lay-a-way for my oldest daughter in Ohio. Janine was the attendant assigned to do the procedure. Later, she saw me in the department store paying for the item and was deeply moved. She thought that most people who sold blood did so in order to have money for drugs and alcohol.

We cultivated a relationship over a six month period. We prospered together economically and spiritually. She expanded my world. For the first time in a great while, I did not crave for or miss my wife. Janine was a beautiful woman whose presence demanded respect. She was responsible for me maintaining a long distance relationship with my children. She remembered their birthdays and sent them gifts in my name. She was also instrumental in bringing me back to the church. Her pastor

was someone who understood the difficulties and paradoxes of inner-city life. He lived a life of service to the community which was largely Black and Hispanic. He saw something in me and solicited my help in his efforts to assist congregational members to complete forms for health and welfare applications. This brought me into close association with the lives of these people. Most were wonderful people who sometimes reminded me of my own community of loved ones, the family I came from. I began to re-develop my social consciousness again. Things began to happen that propelled me into leadership positions. I gained a position of trust and respect in the community. Whenever we walked through the community, we were greeted with high regard. These people became my family and I had found purpose.

Janine died of cancer April 28, 1987. The year before she died, we talked about my future in the ministry. She urged me to go back to school and work for the purpose of ministry. She believed in me so much that she asked her pastor to allow me to baptize her. I did, and I shall never forget her last words to me. She said, "Richard, God has prepared a place for you in great places. Tell the world the truth. Don't be bought off. There are a lot of people depending on you!" After she died, I went to Central State University in Ohio to finish my degree in history and political science. Later, I graduated from Payne Theological Seminary in Wilberforce, Ohio and continued at the Seminary Consortium of Urban Pastoral Education in Chicago, Illinois. God provided for me in all of these situations. Space does not permit me to tell the stories about how and what God did to intercede in my life and on my behalf. Let's just say that **God opened doors**

nobody but God could open! However, the most important issue was not my degrees, but a reconciliation with my wife and children.

Since we all lived in the same state, I contacted them. We were approximately 200 miles apart and I was given permission to visit. I was amazed at how much the children had grown in five years. They were still well behaved and I could feel their love for me. My wife and I were able to talk and connect on a variety of issues. She was, nevertheless, adamant about us just working together for the benefit of the children. That was okay for me too because I wanted to take things slowly.

I could tell that my children were misinformed about some things. Arnora's family seemed to make decisions for her. I helped financially but I didn't have any influence over the children. My wife's mother and sisters had all the influence. When Arnora and I seemed to be getting closer, something would happen to destroy it. After about a year of trying to get the family back together, Arnora discovered that she had cancer. She asked me to come during the operation and stay with the children. It was during this crisis that I developed a closer relationship with my wife and children. After three weeks, Arnora asked me to leave because she didn't want to destroy the relationship with her mother. After all, her mother had been there in her time of need. I had not lived up to my responsibilities even though I was willing to step in and help as best I could. Arnora died March 20, 1992. Before she died, she asked me to take the children. She did not want them raised by her mother and sisters because the environment was too negative.

I wanted the children. My three oldest daughters, nevertheless, wanted to stay

with their aunts. Since they were over 18, I couldn't force them to come. I did bring four of my children to live with me. The transformation has not been easy because of the resentments, but God has provided for me and the children. I have been in Illinois for two years now. My children have been very active in church and school. I remarried on February 12, 1994. Our lives are beginning to merge into a wonderful story. We attend family counseling once a week and it has been beneficial to all of us. Three of my children still remain alienated from me, but I believe in patience and perseverance.

In retrospect, I have come to understand what I learned by trial and error. I move in the direction of self awareness little by little. I have learned the value of struggle. It seems that life has always assigned me the tough jobs. I have learned to face the task head on. That which I feared the most, I now approach. I know that my life will always be tied to the lives of others. During that period in my life when I experienced loss of job, position and status, I realized that all the outer trappings could disintegrate. I believe what made the difference for me was the majesty of the soul which kept me fighting to survive, the tenacity of the spirit, a willingness to change and courage to respond to each difficult assignment in a positive way. This is the self as given by God. I discovered that the divine image cannot be eradicated. Further, all the emphasis I had placed upon philosophical insight was to no avail. Humanism had failed me and there was no place to go, save to God. Marxism, Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism all sounded so good to the inquiring mind. Even these ideas, however, had been twisted to benefit the few who administered

them as corruption raced through the Civil Rights movement. Legitimate leadership was replaced by the "robber-baron" mentality. The media was utilized to develop the "reel" change instead of real social transformation.

I was devastated! I was completely wiped out! Everything I had hoped for, worked and sacrificed for, was over. The rhythm and momentum of the movement came to a stop. The wounded were all around me. Broken bodies and spirits were covered with torn dashikis and field jackets. Just like Langston Hughes, I wondered, "what happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun? Does it explode? Or, does it become lost in an opiate dream?" I concluded, all of the above. I became as a vagabond, but I was determined not to lie down and die. I kept moving, trying to catch a glimpse of yesterday's glory. I kept trying and searching to find something that could inspire me to live again. Even the Black church became a priestly imitation of its former prophetic tradition; it no longer urged or encouraged the congregation to unmask and confront, but rather to accept its present fate.

To make matters worse, fashion designers began producing fatigue jackets and assorted guerilla fashions. Middle class Blacks distanced themselves from the struggle. There was famine in the land. I ended up working minimum wage jobs just trying to survive. Something happened in the midst of that struggle. I began to relate to people with a sense of honesty and integrity. The amazing thing is that most responded in the same manner. I started building a life again from square one, but this time emphasizing and living the principles that sustain life.

I returned home, at least in the rich memories of my childhood. I remembered old sayings that folks had spoken to me. I took a spiritual pilgrimage back to the beginning of my journey. I visited the resting places of relatives who had departed. With deep reverence, I celebrated their lives and cherished their memories. I felt a real connection with these memories even though some were painful. I engaged in some real soul searching. It was impossible to re-visit my past without visiting the church. This time, I developed a relationship with Christ. I came exactly as I was and growth started to take place within me and my relationships. I was no longer a spectator. I became a participant! God changed my life and gave me a reason to be. I believe that God allowed me to go through all the difficult times in order to bring me to the place where I am now. Today, my life is richly blessed. It can be said that this is the best time yet for me and my family. Writing this paper has been a part of the healing that is taking place in myself and my family.

When old folks use to sing, "can't nobody do you like Jesus," I now understand what they meant. It's not an academic discussion. **If God can change me, then I know that his blood can reclaim the lives of individuals and systems.** What I have found to be true in my life is that, in the midst of struggle and turmoil, God always makes His appearance.

CHAPTER III

THE CONTEXT OF WHERE I DO MINISTRY

The village of Matteson was named after the tenth governor of Illinois, Joel Aldrich Matteson, who held office from 1853-1857. In 1855, Charles Ohlendorf became the first merchant and homeowner. By 1880, Matteson had a wagon shop, two hotels, two general stores, two saloons, shoe shop, clothing store, hardware, furniture store, two harness shops, blacksmith and wagon shop and a grain elevator with a capacity of 20,000 bushels. The first school was established in 1865.

Primarily a German settlement, the town flourished due to the strategic location of three railroads -- the Michigan Central, Illinois Central and later the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern.

By 1897, the population had increased to 500 people. Time, however, stood still for this metropolis until the end of World War II. Then, once again, Matteson's population started to increase when many returning veterans sought housing there. Since the 1950's, Matteson has had steady and progressive growth in residential areas as well as a recent expansion in business and retail development. The motto, "**Crossroads of Heritage and Progress**," truly exemplifies the Village of Matteson.

Matteson -- A Community Profile

General Information: Located 30 miles south of Chicago's downtown and lakefront. Matteson (pronounced Matt-e-sun) has grown into a major retail and office center with a variety of attractive sub-divisions with custom built homes.

Neighboring Communities: Matteson shares boundaries with Olympia Fields, Frankfort, Country Club Hills, Park Forest, Tinley Park and Richton Park.

Population: 11,378 (1990 Census)

Demographics: 52% White; 44%Black; 4%Other (1990 Census)

Median Age: 32 (1990 Census)

Median Household Income: \$51,233 (Sun-Times "Living in Greater Chicago")

Housing: Single-family homes range in price from \$65,000 to over \$250,000

Average Home Value: \$81,770 (1991 MLS Sales)

Median Rent: \$473 (1990 Census)

Taxes: Property tax rates per \$100 are 10.093 for property within School District 162 and 10.667 for property in School District 159 (1990 Tax Rate)

Corporate Parks: Southgate Commerce Center (153 acres); Corporate Lakes (198 acres); and Transcontinental Properties, Matteson Commons (200 acres)

Shopping: Matteson's retail corridor, located along Lincoln Highway and along Cicero Avenue north and south of Lincoln Highway, features more than 2.2 million feet of retail centers including: Lincoln Mall, a regional shopping center with 143 stores; Matteson Plaza; Matteson Towncenter; Marketplace Plaza; Venture Plaza; and Wal-Mart/Sam's Club.

Transportation: Two, four-way interchanges from Interstate 57 lead directly to Chicago. Travel time to O'Hare Airport is approximately 45 minutes. Interstate 80, Interstate 294 and Interstate 394 interchange with Interstate 57 and can be used to reach virtually any point in the United States. U.S. 30 (Lincoln Highway) and Illinois 50 (Cicero Avenue) criss-cross the Village. PACE Bus and Metra/ICG commuter lines carry residents to Chicago.

Health Facilities: Olympia Fields Osteopathic Medical Center, Olympia Fields; St. James Hospital, Chicago Heights; Suburban Heights Medical Center, Chicago Heights; South Suburban Hospital, Hazel Crest; and Ingalls Family Care Center, Matteson.

Schools: Matteson is served by Rich Township High School District 227; two

elementary school districts (259 and 162); several private and parochial schools and pre-schools. Rich Township High School 227 was a recent recipient of the U.S. Department of Education's "Schools of Excellence" award. Expenditure per pupil is \$7,358 in Rich Township High School District 227; \$4,858 in District 159; and \$4,192 in District 162.

Elementary
School District 159

Marya Yates School
Sieden Prairie School
Woodgate School
Neil Armstrong School

Rich Township
School District 227

Rich Central High School
Rich East High School
Rich South High School

Elementary
School District 162

Arcadia Elementary School
Indiana Elementary School
Matteson Elementary School
Sauk Elementary School
Huth Upper Grade Center

Private/Parochial Schools

St. Lawrence O'Toole School
Zion Lutheran School
Marian Catholic High School

Higher Education: Governors State University in University Park and Prairie State College in Chicago Heights.

Library: A new Matteson Public Library has been completed at 207th Street and School Avenue, just North of the current library facility. The new building is 23,000 square feet in size and features a separate children's room with a computer and audio/visual equipment; a separate young adult audio/visual area; two quiet study rooms; a computer typing room with computers and a typewriter; and public access computers to search for materials at the Matteson Library as well as at neighboring libraries. The new library opened in the Fall of 1993.

Recreation: The Parks and Recreation Department is located in the Matteson Community Center, 4450 Oakwood Lane. Its resources amount to 100 acres of park land in six parks, containing lighted tennis courts, a fitness center, sodded ball fields, picnic areas, a community center and more than 400 program offerings. Health, tennis and racquetball centers, swimming pools, country clubs, private and public golf courses and riding stables are in Matteson or nearby. Acres of forest preserves and nature centers, trails for cross-country skiing, hiking, jogging and bicycling are minutes away.

Public Safety: The Matteson Police Department operates with a staff of 32 sworn officers; a Chief of Police; 12 full-time civilian employees and four part-time

employees from a contemporary, state-of-the-art police building located at 20500 Cicero Avenue. The Matteson Fire Department, founded in 1894, operates out of two manned Fire Stations: Station #1 at the Village Hall complex and Station #2 just north of the intersection of Lincoln Highway and Central Avenue. The Fire Department has a staff of 20 full-time fire-fighters and a Fire Chief, augmented by ten paid-on-call fire-fighters and eight volunteers. Superior equipment and top-rated manpower bring a class "5" rating to the Matteson Fire Department. 911 emergency telephone service is in effect throughout the Village of Matteson.

Houses of Worship: Many churches and synagogues are located either in Matteson or in neighboring communities.

The Community of New Faith Baptist Church

1. The History of New Faith¹

In 1975, the Rev. Junius Dudley made a study of the Park Forest area (in the south suburbs) and found integrated churches. He did not find, however, a Black pastor, Black associate pastor, Blacks in leadership or a Black church. With this concern, Rev. Dudley surveyed the community and gathered together a small core of people. He made an appeal to Rev. Dale Cross of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), who was interested in Black church status, for funds to start a church. Rev. Cross agreed there was a need and New Faith began as a Southern Baptist Mission with supplemental income for the pastor and all the resources of the SBC.

Sixty- seven people attended the first service held at Blackhawk Elementary

¹Rev. Frank Thomas and Rev. Donnette Vaughn, The Church on Target (Matteson: copyright pending, 1990), 1.6-1.12.

School in Park Forest on January 4, 1976. The church grew rapidly and established organizations with broadened ministries. In 1978, New Faith had 150 members and was blossoming. Rev. Dudley resigned as pastor on December 31, 1978.

The church continued to grow and called Rev. Donald Johnson as the second pastor on June 3, 1979. By this time, New Faith had grown to over 250 members. However, under the leadership of Rev. Johnson, the church had a "split" in membership. December, 1980, Rev. Johnson moved New Faith to Emmanuel Seven-Day Advent Church in Chicago Heights, Illinois as a temporary facility. The group that remained at the school constituted as a church and named themselves Greater Faith and called in a new pastor. Rev. Donald Johnson resigned as the pastor of New Faith on April 12, 1981.

The membership dwindled during this stressful time. There was some talk of closing the doors after the congregation fell to 30 active members. On January 10, 1982, Rev. Frank Thomas was called as the third pastor of New Faith. The membership began to grow again and the congregation sought to move from the rented facility to its own edifice. September, 1982, New Faith purchased five acres of land in Matteson, Illinois. October 12, 1985, the church broke ground for a permanent facility. February 22, 1987, with 287 members, New Faith moved to its first home at 25 S. Central Avenue, Matteson, Illinois.

After moving into the new facility, growth was phenomenal. The church added over 1,300 members in four years and purchased 22 additional acres of land to accommodate the long range dreams of the congregation. This brought the total

land ownership to 27 acres. The congregation had already outgrown the new facility and several years prior, began worshipping in two services. Continued growth has now forced the church to add another worship service, bringing the total to three. The church has also tried to develop diversified programs to meet the needs of a growing congregation. It has added a major Bible study program that provides training for new members in Youth, Pastoral Care, Justice and other ministries to meet the needs of the community.

2. The Make-Up of New Faith

The membership of New Faith is young. Thirty-five percent of the male population and thirty-six percent of the female population is between 21 and 40 years of age. This indicates a membership in prime family/child rearing age. Only four percent of the males and six percent of the females are 51 years of age. The majority of children are between the ages of 9 and 15.

Fifty-three percent of the membership are married, twenty-nine percent single, fifteen percent divorced and three percent widowed. Seventy-three percent of the males and sixty-seven percent of the females are employed full time. Male unemployment is at twelve percent while female unemployment is at two percent. The average family income is \$35,000 per year, with sixty-one percent above \$30,000 and thirty-nine percent below \$30,000. The membership of New Faith is well educated. Seventy-eight percent of the membership have some college and thirty-one percent have college degrees. Twenty-seven percent have done post-

graduate work while twenty percent have finished graduate school. The congregation is composed of mostly middle-class African-Americans whose parents migrated from the South during the 1940's and 1950's. There is also a representation of parents who lived during the Civil Rights era of the 1960's. This was a time when many African-Americans felt outraged by the injustice of the class structured White society.

It is important for the reader to understand the background of the people to fully grasp their need for holistic worship that extends beyond Sunday worship service. In order to understand the context of ministry at New Faith Baptist Church, one must enjoy the lens of tools from a historical, sociological and psychological perspective.

First, Historically:

The Black Church was the one significant mitigating organization that stood between Black people and the utter hopelessness of slavery and it has remained the prime source of strength and leadership for Black dissent ever since.²

To some extent, the church was an escapist institution. E. Franklin Frazier observed that it had two roots. The first root was exemplified by the efforts of free Negroes in the North who tried to escape their inferior position in White churches and assert their independence. The second root was demonstrated by what has aptly been called the "invisible" institution which existed on the plantations during slavery.

²E. Franklin Frazier, Black Bourgeoisie, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1957), 87.

Some of the stories that congregational members tell about their struggles toward respectability in the "historic south" are manifested in their desire to pursue excellence in all phases of the worship experience.

At New Faith, the search for respectability and excellence is borne out of the denial of inclusion into the mainstream of life in America. The psyche of New Faith Baptist Church is connected to the historical experience of the "heroes and "sheroes" who told their sacred stories to their grand-children. Everyone has a story that has been passed down from generation to generation telling of the talents and gifts of relatives that were not recognized and applauded by mainstream society. Some tell of great orators and preachers who were men of excellence, only to be ignored by the majority culture.

At New Faith, there is a great need and desire to employ staff ministers who have distinguished themselves in their particular field of ministry. Due to the size of the church, separate departments had to be established and someone selected to head them for administrative purposes. Therefore, the congregation expects the ministerial leaders to have significant credentials and experience. I often tell new staff members that New Faith does not take prisoners when it comes to its employees. If you preach on Sunday, you better not come with some half-baked sermon. The congregation expects you to deliver a well prepared message. I might also add that no one on the church staff is excluded from excellence. From the janitor to the pastor, everyone is expected to do an excellent job.

This historical experience that has forced its way into the psyche, even

though many have never directly experienced this condition firsthand, has had an impact on the work we do for God. Congregational members, some of whom are first and second generation recipients of college and graduate degrees, have made a profound impact upon the church and the community of Matteson. The educational rewards of hard work have not only produced economic opportunity for many of them, but also provided a framework of excellence that has been transferred to the church.

A new professionalism, which demands organization, now exists at New Faith. This creates positive relationships with other community institutions in Matteson and makes my job as Minister of Justice easier. Private and community organizations operate on a model of professionalism. If we are to be effective in carrying out our mission and become involved in a meaningful way, we must utilize models of communication that connect rather than separate. Sociologically speaking, I believe that congregational members have had a positive impact on the entire Matteson community. Educational institutions and political parties have been affected in a positive way by the growth of our church.

The psychological gains from this economic security of education and good jobs has manifested and produced self-esteem in our congregation. People are willing to participate in the ministry and are enthusiastic about doing work in the church. These conditions at New Faith create a very positive feeling of community within the church. Many express a willingness and a desire to attend church functions. I believe, however, there are obstacles and barriers which keep us from

touching each other and the community in which we live.

We possess the talents and abilities to transform the world. Lately, I have wondered about the compartmentalizing and bureaucracy that keep people from touching each other in appropriate ways. For instance, sometimes I believe that my position as Minister of Justice (which deals with leading the church in the community to deal with political, economic and social issues) has created a real challenge for me. The exciting things that are going on in the church have created what I call, "a space to love" by putting flesh on our beliefs. There are 52 different ministries that operate within New Faith Baptist Church. They range from administrative tasks to ministry that takes place inside as well as outside the church.

As Minister of Justice, my job is to direct the attention of the congregation to social issues that need redress. Unfortunately, some of these issues such as substance abuse, AIDS and help for the underprivileged raise great concern in our congregation (at least in terms of participation). Most of the time, in the Justice ministry, I find approximately 10% of the people shouldering the responsibility of the entire ministry. This observation can be buttressed by the fact that there is an effort within this congregation to stay "connected" with our ancestral past, at least with voices, for the greater good of the community. The socialization process to middle class serves to create a mentality of "us and them." One of my challenges is to create a Christian form that makes it palatable to the average member to increase growth in the Christian experience.

Although the desire for respectability is a positive impetus for growth in the

church, its downside is borne out of the conformity of the status quo. This attitude prevents the risk taking that is vital and necessary to confront and transform the powers that be. Risk taking is vital in the life of our congregation because it connects us with not only our historic past, but our Christian roots. Anything other than this will result in a country club mentality.

Part of my job is to participate in developing enthusiasm and clarifying issues that we face as people. The atmosphere at New Faith Baptist Church is being primed for great things. Although the congregation is looking for high-tech structures and accommodations, they are also looking for "hi-touch" in their church interactions. This is demonstrated through the Youth Ministry programs. Many parents who are making out quite well economically look to the church to provide the major impact of familiar services to their children. This is understandable because many work long hours in the city and must commute back to the suburbs in the evenings. Thus, youth activities and family counseling are in huge demand at the church.

Another component connected with that equation is the large number of single educated females who are active in the church ministry. I have noticed that the women of New Faith have shown, through their actions and participation in ministry, their unconditional love to the disinherited and the broken hearted. I see Black women making choices and being empowered in their daily interactions. It's exciting to see how many women at New Faith take risks and challenge the congregation to go forth healing and helping inside and outside the church.

A routine day for me at New Faith might consist of crisis counseling involving drugs, suicide, unpaid utility bills, need for shelter and anything from drive-by shootings to prison visits. Much of my time is spent working with community organizations along with planning systems and structures which will improve the quality of life in the community. I also spend a great deal of time writing letters and articles that pertain to issues which affect the church and community. I speak at schools and churches about social justice issues such as jobs, gangs, drugs, guns and teen pregnancy. Recently, I have been involved in organizing the men's ministry in marching and holding prayer vigils in front of drug houses. On weekends, I participate in the ministerial duties of the church such as preaching, baptizing, baby blessings, etc.

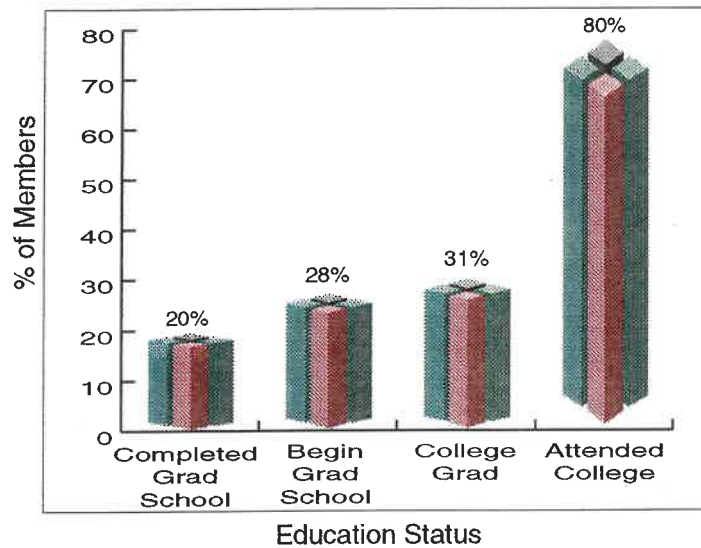
The worship at New Faith is a splendid experience for me. It motivates me to go beyond one fixed mode of traditional worship. Although the worship is traditionally African-American in terms of its spirited form, some high church anthems are sung by the choir. This indicates a willingness of the congregation to accept the best of many traditions of worship. Mass, during special seasons, is celebrated along with confessional lines of high church liturgy.

Diversity, in terms of worship, feeds into the congregation's need to be "respectable." If I were asked to evaluate the congregation in terms of its spiritual depth, I would caution the church visitor not to be misled by the "outer garments" of spirited singing and hand clapping, but to evaluate us along the lines of ministerial participation. My intention is not to be overly critical. I simply state that we need

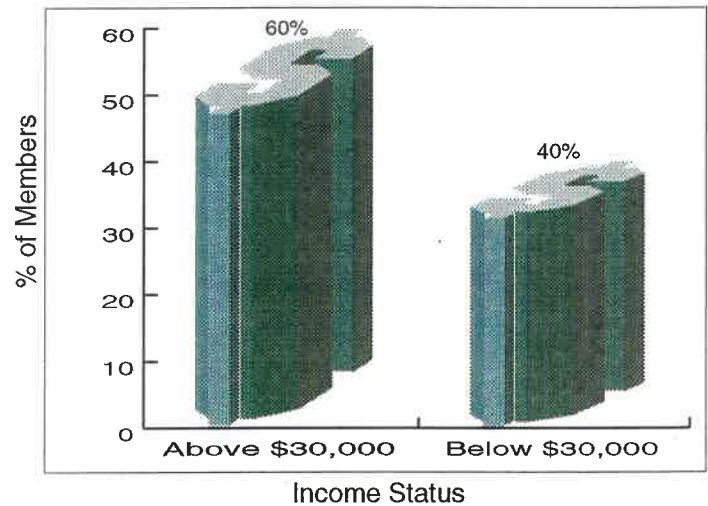
more follow-through when it comes to the work that needs to be done outside the church.

Finally, I believe that New Faith Baptist Church is at the crossroads of becoming a full Gospel church with a global mission of healing the sick and providing wholeness to those who are broken. This is in contrast to becoming largely a middle-class institution that provides a "pain pill" every week to anesthetize congregational members who would prefer to be "hearers of the word rather than doers." **I believe that New Faith Baptist Church can be in the vanguard of churches, in this nation, which point the way to Christ.** New Faith can become an agent of God's Kingdom by helping people pull off their masks and discover the true God given self beneath. This self knows that it is connected with brothers and sisters behind prison walls in a great beloved community. A prison ministry can be the catalyst for the recovery of the self and the restoration of the family.

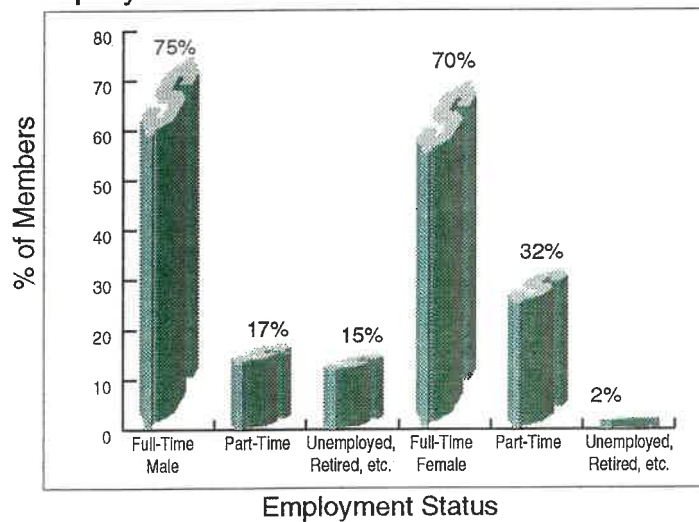
Educational Statistics of New Faith Members



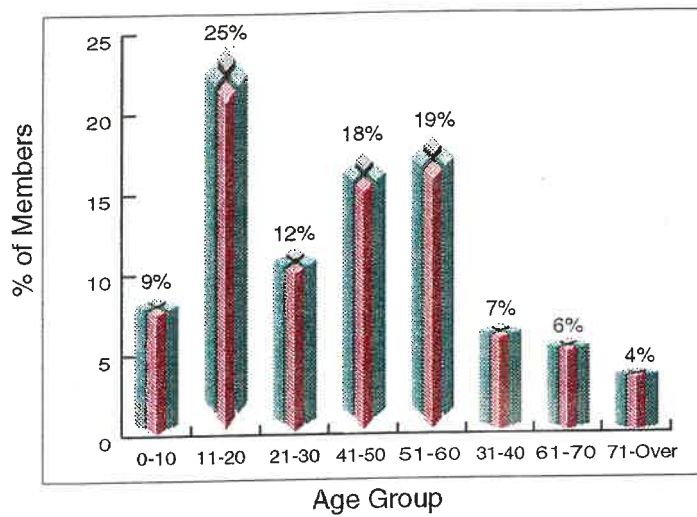
Income Statistics of New Faith Members



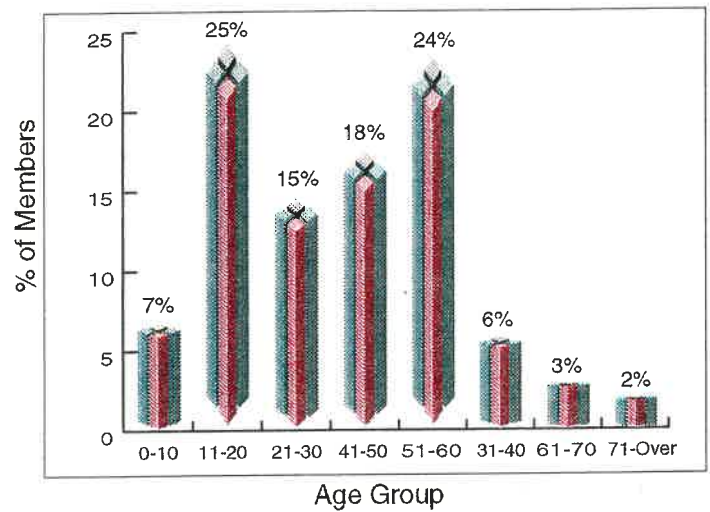
Employment Statistics of New Faith Members



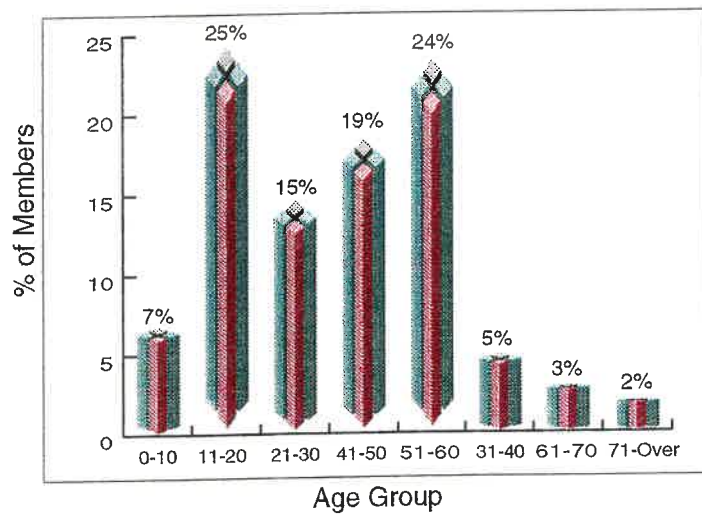
Age Statistics of New Faith Members
(Male)



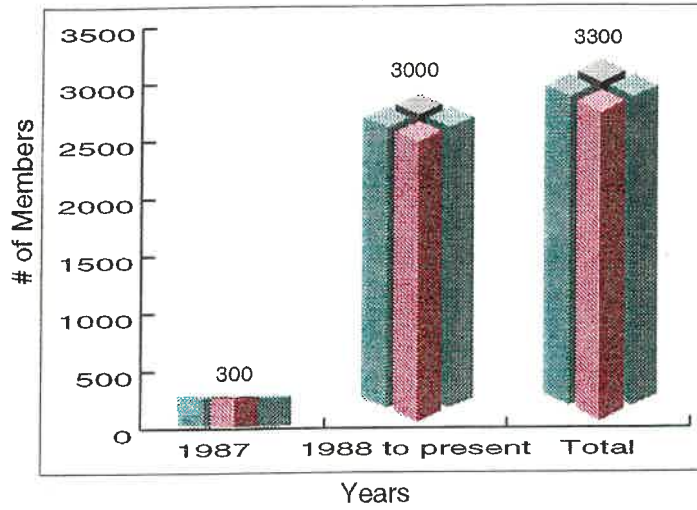
Age Statistics of New Faith Members
(Female)



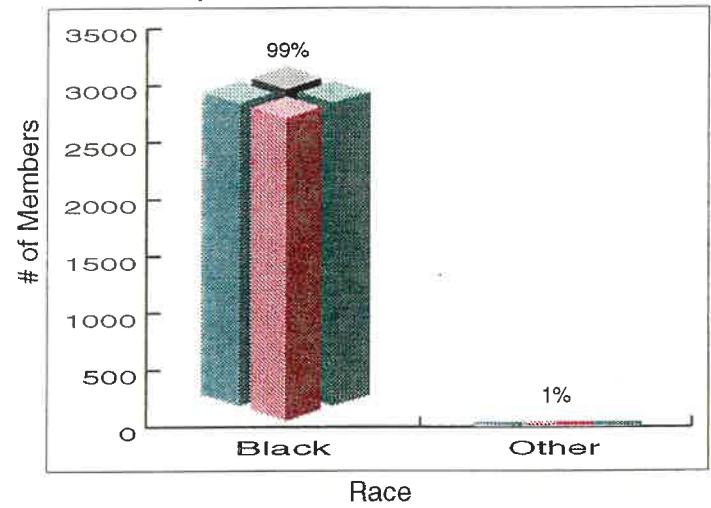
Age Statistics of New Faith Members
(Male and Female)



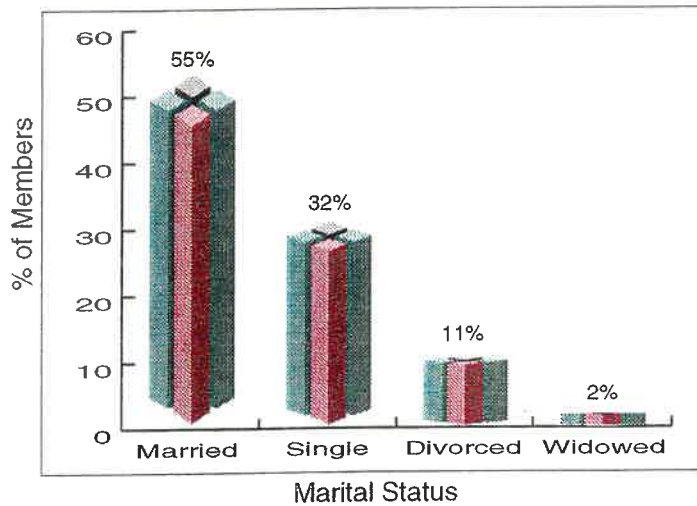
Membership Growth Rate



Racial Composition of New Faith Membership



Marital Statistics of New Faith Members



CHAPTER IV

THE SYNERGY

All of us have been involved in activities which have, in one way or another, prepared the way for developing a perspective and insight into our tomorrows. Often, we go through experiences that we feel are meaningless, only to discover at some later time, those experiences did indeed prepare us for something that we had to do in our lives.

A passage in the Book of Jeremiah states that God knew us before we were in our mother's womb. This tells me, every situation we experience as Christians, is pre-destined to prepare us for our own life's work. This is good news for me because, even as I reflect on the mistakes of my life, I know that "all things work together for the good when you love the Lord."

I also see a process of spiritual growth that has prepared me for my present position in the ministry. My family of origin (with all of the folk ways and mores of the society in which I lived), factors of race, class and gender have all been instruments which have molded me into the person I am today. The era that I was born into was no accident. Historical perspectives come alive when family stories and anecdotes provide a "genogram" of living breathing illustrations of who we are based on who came before us. Thus, we are inextricably tied into the fabric of the sum total of our experiences within our family unit along with our ancestral past, but we can explore our existence and God's influence further in our lives. Romans 8

states that we were pre-destined or pre-ordained to be what we have become. We were connected to God's umbilical cord long before we were connected to our parents. It is through touching, communicating and interacting in our human existence that we grow and develop into what God would have us to be. Through familial and social experiences, we are given a lens with which to view the world.

It was no mere accident that I was born into an African-American family in the 1940's. Being born a Black male in America at that time afforded me with experiences that colored the lens in which I was to view life. My identification with oppressed people was formed from direct experiences with an oppressive power structure. The early experiences in my life provided me with tools to solve problems. My familial interactions gave me the emotional temperament to follow through and bring closure to difficult issues that I faced in my personal life.

Being a member of an oppressed minority helped me to understand that I was a part of a much larger fabric of society than my own nuclear family. The dichotomy of "sacred" and "secular" was fused into a oneness so that I came to view all of creation as sacred. Since the dominant society often portrayed Blacks as less than human, I realized that struggle was a necessary component of life. Through our survival, we come to know who we really are and how we have changed as a result of the struggle. I believe that my experiences have afforded me the convictions to struggle and fight for social change in society. Furthermore, it sustained me with the realization that sometimes the "Kingdom of God" must be taken by force.

In the African-American community, there are churches on every corner. However, we still suffer from every social ailment known to mankind. There were 12 churches in the community where I grew up. The only time I saw them work together was at the annual ecumenical celebration. Each church served as a kingdom unto itself with serfs and kings. People were often exploited by the religious leaders. Individuals who really needed help were passed by time after time again.

As I went through the seminary, I saw the same pattern of business as usual. Seminarians who aspired to have large churches, bestowed honor and glory on themselves because of their academic accomplishments. All of this is not bad within itself, but when long flowing robes and religious apparatus become the trappings of egocentric behavior, the people suffer and die. I'm familiar with deception because I was guilty of wearing a mask that concealed who I really was as a person. I can spot a "phony" a mile away. I decided to get beyond the games people play and make a difference in my life and society.

During my "blue period," I lived by my instincts and impressions of people. I am happy to report that I am no longer impressed with credentials or where a person went to school. More important to me is a willingness in a person's heart to make a difference in the quality of life.

For me, years of trying to make real changes were always tempered by religious establishments. Denominations and churches in my community attempted to control every project and person who sought to transform society in a positive

way. It appeared that power was the ultimate consideration in many of their decisions. Many times, I had to develop methodologies and ways to circumvent the religious establishment in order to help people.

Even at the time of this writing, many of these things remain the same business as usual. The only difference is reorganization of structure which gives the impression of progress, but in truth, it remains unchanged. The same people are helped (the hierarchy) and the same people are ignored (poor, oppressed, incarcerated, homeless, etc.). It's enough to make someone weary with all the theological language, academic regalia and meetings on poverty held at luxury hotels while the blood of our brothers and sisters cries from the ground across the urban centers of our country. I believe my stamina and endurance were developed from early childhood by my family and the preserving power of the Holy Spirit. I had almost given up on the church as an institution to transform society. I had encountered too many fat preachers who loved to sit at the head table and ego trip. Incredibly, I came to New Faith (my present ministerial site) and found to my surprise a ministerial situation empowering people rather than tearing them down. New Faith emphasized a staff concept in administering ministry to the community.

As Justice Minister, I am given support and props. I can dare to dream and implement these dreams into real programs that actually help people. I also receive input from other staff persons who have developed an expertise in other areas of ministry. My ministerial site also gives me financial support to develop and implement a program which can affect a sizable number of people. The church has

52 operating ministries and any program that I implement has their support. Any program dealing with gangs, guns or drugs would be supported by any of our Youth Ministries. Logistically, I can call on the resources of the church which includes people as well as money. The location of the church is ideal because we're close enough to the city to benefit institutions and network with individuals and groups who seek to transform social systems.

I believe that the church can transform social systems in this country, particularly those problems that relate to the African-American community. There must be a change, however, in the leadership of some of these churches. Leaders must be concerned about people and push toward reclaiming individuals and systems which have been taken over by the enemy. One of the areas in which the African-American church should bow its head in shame is the issue of brothers and sisters in jail. The church has deserted these brothers and sisters. Almost every program developed for the incarcerated has been developed by Whites. At visitation time, few Black clergy are present. If we really believe that the blood of Jesus saves, why not do it there? I believe that the Muslims have been very effective in developing programs for reviving brothers and sisters who are in prison. They have also developed bridges for helping them gain stability in society.

As my project, I wish to develop a prison ministry that would allow me to utilize other components of the 52 ministries that New Faith provides. Many prison ministries focus on the prisoner and not the family. At New Faith, we could support the family and the children through youth and pastoral ministries. Those families

could be brought into the church where the Benevolence and Employment Ministries could be useful in maintaining those families.

In order to grow and develop, one must come face to face with one's problems. It was necessary for me to come face to face with my drug addiction (which destroyed my capacity to experience community). Many African-Americans believe that they can leave a dysfunctional family setting and receive happiness by achieving a certain lifestyle. This idea is firmly imbedded in their minds. These are two pathologies that can be unmasked by exposure to story telling and open discussion.

The possibility of "deeper recovery" for those African-American congregational members who have achieved high status through education and job opportunities, becomes a reality. They can be freed from the dualistic mentality of "us and the." Thus, New Faith becomes the arena to provide the setting for the therapeutic process of "going home" or a re-visiting of the past. It has been said, "As long as some of us are in prison, none of us can be truly free."

In this particular atmosphere, where ancestral stories are continually being repeated, the connection is still a very active part of real "person-hood." To expose one's self to the stories of the poor and the disenfranchised will permit the congregation (at least those who allow it) to unmask the nature of the church's need to pursue respectability beyond parameters where it would not be deemed healthy for real social change to occur, thereby improving the quality of life for the masses of people.

Secondly, it would benefit by forcing us to look into the faces and hear the voices of suffering, which is so inherent in our past and present. This process would bring healing and wholeness to the church in general. The Christian imperative of seeking the lost sheep can be realized by our out-stretched arms...only for us to be embraced by God's out-stretched arms.

It takes a special type of person to facilitate and lead this ministry. I believe that in this time and space in history, I am the one whom God has chosen to bridge this gulf. I am equally at home in the "projects" or the "Governor's mansion." I understand suffering from both sides and I know how to work with the system and structures of the hierarchy at New Faith Baptist Church.

Our church society functions on compromises which are worked out between various power groups in the congregation. Each group or ministry attempts to position itself for control of its share of resources. Each group is involved in a respectable struggle and seeks to pursue its own self interests. Thus, the Youth Ministry seeks to obtain its slice of the church budget while the Justice Ministry seeks to gain in its own interests. In this process, only God is omnipotent and each of us understands that we are only stewards for what God has given unto us. Decisions are made when we sit down together and work out a compromise. At New Faith Baptist Church, the people and the time are ripe for this new ministry.

CHAPTER V

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

When I reflect on the life of the historical Jesus throughout the gospels, he always seemed to show up at the address of those who were alienated or ostracized. The actions of his life transcended divisions and allowed mankind to experience the divinity without regard to social strata or economic class. In fact, what God did through Jesus was to take off the "mask" at Calvary. He took off the "mask" of sexism, "classism" and racism which is so destructive of experiencing true community. There is an authentic self, given by God. This self is made for community with God and others, but the true self is masked by class, race and culture.

Today's church plays an ambiguous role in the formation of the self; it nurtures but also provides a religious justification for the false (masked) self. The "mask" creates a false consciousness of "us and them," the free and the incarcerated, which is destructive to the community. The Apostle Paul is a good example of the evolving self. He experiences through his culture and arrives at the authentic place where God wants him to be.

Paul begins his experience as a respected citizen of Tarsus, connected to the aristocracy and the land gentry. One can tell by reading his letters that this man was not born in the proletariat class, but enjoyed the privileges of education and social standing in his community. Paul started with a secure position in the society into

which he was born, but there was one problem that he faced. He was a Jew, a bloodline that was pure and he celebrated that fact even though he was born into a society where he was a minority. Jews of Paul's day expressed a strong nationalistic view and many achieved a wealthy status and social prominence even though they were an unpopular minority. He was brought up as a Pharisee and it was instilled in him that he belonged to the chosen people of God. His consciousness was intensely prideful of the dignity that came with being a Pharisee. He gloried in the fact that he was a member of this select group but he was drawn out into the busy life of Greco-Roman society. There was a large separation between him and the larger society in which he lived. He lived in a society that had huge gulfs and exclusions that prevented him from venturing too far into it.

I am sure that his intellectual and sympathetic nature prompted him to develop some relationships with the Gentile world, but being who he was prevented him from identifying in a meaningful way within the context of a closed society. When one is exposed to exclusion, the natural reaction is often one of prideful response. In Philippians 3:5-6, "If anyone thinks he has ground for self-confidence in his natural advantages, I can beat him three--circumcised the eighth day, Israelite by decent, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew speaking, and of a Hebrew speaking family; in regard to the Torah, a Pharisee."

C.H. Dodd, a New Testament scholar, states that, "That meant further that his whole inward comfort and satisfaction must depend on living up to the demands of his ideal. The Torah was a comprehensive religious and ethical system: it was a

norm of belief, a liturgy of worship, a mold for a spiritual experience and aspiration, but above all it was a code of rules for conduct."³ I believe that within these folkways and mores that the dichotomy of "us and them" played a dominant role in Paul's formation of his "evolving self."

Being excluded from the wider society forced him to focus on rules and laws that repressed his natural desire to branch out into the wider society. He suppressed his instincts to accommodate the "law of his mind." Paul must have known from his experience in growing up in a Gentile world the mobility of all human beings, whether they be Jew or Gentile. His natural sensibilities in that arena must have aroused a keen interest in the commonality of all people to experience the same needs, desires, dreams and aspirations.

By wearing the "mask" he could hide his inner conflict and hold up the law. Further, C.H. Dodd puts Paul's struggle into perspective by stating, "He has staked all of his pride in the law. At the same time, he was aware that this picture of himself as the perfect Pharisee was denied by facts of his own experience. It was fantasy, not reality. Every effort he could make within the bounds of the Torah was only deepening the cleft which divided his soul in two. The expedience of consecrating himself to a Holy war against the Nazareans could not finally deliver him from this division in the self. We cannot imagine such a man as Paul finding

³C.H. Dodd, New Testament Studies (England: University of Manchester, 1953), 74.

permanent satisfaction in hatred--if indeed any man could ever find it."⁴

The solution to his conversion had to do with the inner conflicts that he was having in his life. It was humanly impossible for him to keep the law. He had to abandon the fantasy of himself as the perfect Pharisee. Pride in his heritage and the Torah were the trappings that prevented him from growing and seeing that no one could measure up to or fulfill the law. Many of our churches are that way--too often standing in a sterile environment dividing the sacred from the secular, the body from the soul and the sheep from the goats.

The result of this way of thinking, is a congregation that is provided with positive reinforcement to escape from this world with no responsibility to go to places where no one wants to go or to touch people that no one cares about. Like Paul, the church, in order to carry out its mandate, must abandon any claim for individual or personal pride and surrender it all to God in Christ. He is the suffering, bleeding and dying God. It is only through dying attitudes of pride and culture that we can get beyond the spiritual crisis of "us and them" and achieve a "second conversion" of entering a more inclusive conception of the will of God. Paul's mistake was in glorifying the law; he glorified himself and in his own achievements. Once we trust God and understand that we all have fallen short, then we can connect with our communities in a meaningful way.

The early Christians, for example, responded to the imprisoned in a

⁴C.H. Dodd, 77.

different way than the wider society. Often, family and friends abandoned the imprisoned because they didn't want to be associated for fear of being implicated or sometimes because of shame. Sometimes, visitors were implicated simply because they visited inmates.

There was a veil of shame over inmates in general, whether or not they were guilty. There was a great reluctance to be identified with prisoners in general because this was seen as directing attention to immoral or illegal activity. Craig Wansink, in his dissertation entitled, "The Imprisonment for the Gospel," states that "Christians realized that if they were to have any integrity among themselves or any credibility within the broader Roman society, their support for the imprisoned needed to reflect discrimination."⁵

Wansink also refers to Lucian's The Passing of Peregrinus which presents Christians as dedicated to helping any of their people who were in prison. Most prisoners, however, were abandoned by their families and friends.

The Apostle Paul, during his incarceration, was supported by the Philippians because he was "suffering for the gospel." Discrimination was made between common criminals and those who were viewed as political prisoners, but Paul emphasized that those who had a co-partnership in the ministry had the responsibility of taking care of each other. The Philippians visited Paul at the prison

⁵Craig Steven Wansink, Imprisonment for the Gospel: The Apostle Paul and Roman Prisons, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: U.M.I. Dissertation Services, 1993), 133.

bringing gifts with them. The codes and rules of the Roman jails permitted visitors to bring food and clothing to inmates. In fact, that was how many of them survived. Paul's acknowledgment of these gifts reminded the community of faith that they are indeed, distinctive.

Many of the prisoners were encouraged during visitation. This was so very important because the conditions in the prison were so terrible that many committed suicide. Daily life in prison was marked by torture, execution and suicide. One way in which inmates survived was by the exhortation and encouragement of visitors. Finding strength in the faith was also one way prisoners were encouraged to endure their hardships.

Roman prisons were places that were filled with terror and once you were an inmate, there was a good chance that you would never be released. Many persons who had the same first names were often confused with other prisoners and some were left to endure hardships past their proper time of release. The physical conditions of the prisons were such that disease and psychological trauma was quite prevalent. This was due to the fact that the prisons were underground and for the most part, dark places.

One writer of antiquity, Cicero, in trying to describe the fate of Apollonius' imprisonment, emphasized the horrors of darkness: "There is the darkness--the chains--the prison--the tortures of being shut up, of being shut off from the sight of parent and child, nay, from drawing free breath and looking upon the common light of day: from such evils escape may well be bought with life itself--I cannot assess

them in terms of money."⁶

In contrast to this description is the fate of the Christian testimony described in The Martyrdom of Saints Montanus and Lucius: "The dismal prison soon began to shine with the light of the Spirit, and the ardor of our faith clothed us with the brilliance of day to protect us against the ugly shadows and the pitch-black veil of night."⁷

Looking back at prisons in antiquity, we can draw from a reality that still exists in our present day society. We are still faced with the response of the Christian community to those who are imprisoned. If we really believe that the "blood of Jesus" really saves, why are we not there? Too often, we as Christians have bought into our religion by claiming our salvation as an esoteric badge of justification without regard to our responsibilities as members of the body of Christ. In many of our churches, we come to worship in the quiet assurance of other worldliness. This type of thinking has proved disastrous to our African-American communities where there is a church on practically every corner.

The impact of culture can never be underestimated. Historically, its impact on religion and theology in this country, has perverted the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it has become so embedded in the consciousness of the ecclesiastical community that many of us cannot see the real Jesus of the Bible for debris generated by the culture. Many of us in the religious community have become

⁶Wansink, 26.

⁷Wansink, 26.

spectators rather than participants.

In every major urban city across the country, Black families live in crisis situations. There are more young Black males in prison than there are in colleges and universities. Our mission in the church is to be a light in a dark world. We must develop strategies to redeem the families in our broken communities. From Genesis to Revelations is a story about a family -- God's family -- which has been redeemed from destruction. There is a story about a family in Matthew; the prodigal son, a wayward son, comes home after spending his inheritance. Using Biblical illustrations such as this serves as a lens for viewing our society so we can focus on the families of the incarcerated. We can make progress in bringing health to the whole family unit. My model of prison ministry focuses on the family unit, not just the individual who is in jail. The community of faith can concentrate on developing healthy relationships within the family system. The family is the crucible in which self definition and community well being are developed. When the family is ministered to, the health is transferred to the whole body. Therefore, if we are to save our families, we the people of faith cannot stand aside and watch the "captives" while singing songs of Zion while the whole world goes to hell!

In Isaiah 42:7, the Israelites believed that there was a connection between God and their families. That connection begins with the lineage of blood and extends to the wider society. The sanctity of the family brought the church into the role of being a caretaker. This is of special relevance today because there is a need to restore the integrity of the church and the family.

The church must be an example to the world in promoting harmonious living to the community. We must be an example in retrieving that which is lost. Jesus found one lost sheep so important that he left the whole flock to retrieve that one.

The church has the theological mandate to teach forgiveness in the community. It has to be the redemptive refuge for those who have sinned and desire to be made whole. We need to take our rightful place in extending the blood stained banner of Jesus Christ to all who are broken and seek re-instatement into our family of believers.

I believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ can reclaim the lives of the incarcerated. We must however, position ourselves in the vicinity of those who need Christ. We must get beyond stained glass windows and into the community. Only by restoring the broken connections can we be healed. This healing becomes a two-way street that must be traveled not only by the incarcerated, but also by the congregational members. This can only occur when the church takes off its "mask" of sexism, racism and "classism'." This will enable us to experience true community.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MODEL

"What Happens When Nobody Comes?"

In order to implement this model at New Faith, I had to ascertain whether or not the church congregation was supportive of a prison ministry. It is extremely important to gain the support of a significant number of individuals in the body who are willing to push forward and be a part of the cutting edge towards developing and sustaining any new ministry. Thus, identifying resourceful individuals and developing a pulse in the church body is paramount before any other considerations.

I began this process by having small group meetings with people I knew possessed a burning desire to see the prison ministry flourish. Through these meetings, we were able to discuss and outline what we hoped to accomplish in our vision statement. We would have to educate ourselves about the congregation's need to be a part of such a ministry. These meetings became very powerful. The concept of "redemption" and "freeing the captives" from prison was embraced and readily accepted. Many shared personal stories about themselves and/or family members who had been involved with the prison system. These meetings were held once a week. The number of those in attendance began to increase significantly.

Group representation reflected a wide spectrum of the church congregation. We were able to develop a dialogue with individuals and groups that we formerly never interacted with. One result of these meetings provided a forum for people to

tell and openly discuss their "stories" as they related to incarcerated family members. Prior to the time of these meetings, communication was underground and their stories remained well kept family secrets. I knew that we were on the right track when the momentum of the meetings seemed to take on a life. Poignant discussions about the role of the church in these matters, took on new meaning for all of the participants. I would recommend to anyone thinking of starting a prison ministry to begin at the grassroots level. Allow intense dialogue to continue and develop until the group comes to a plan of action.

The incubation stage of this process should include reflection, testimony and theological reflection. This procedure may vary to include all members of the "base group." They must be able to express themselves on the issues they want to focus on. My base group started with 30 people. Gradually, that number was reduced to seven individuals. The base group does not necessarily have to be large but it must contain highly motivated, committed and focused people who have the love of Christ in their lives. This group must also reflect the best and the brightest.

My group was composed of individuals who had excellent communication skills and were able to communicate the vision to the congregation at large. Some possessed interpersonal skills that enabled them to relate to diverse groups of people. Others had teaching skills and were able to impart knowledge that proved invaluable to our success in this growing ministry. My role during this period was to serve as the facilitator of the group. My agenda was to direct the group's momentum into areas that we felt were worth investigating. At times, I came to

these meetings with a fairly focused agenda. I discovered instead, that the group's energy was focused in another area. I had to regroup and go with the positive flow of the members.

I believe in the integrity of the group process. I also realize that it is of paramount importance to define what I believe in, as leader of the group. Self-definition or defining who you are and what you believe in, is very important in maintaining control and focus during the group process. Often, I was pleasantly surprised to find in the balance of these dynamics, a real meeting of the minds. This added greatly to the substance of our interaction. Once we were clear on what we wanted to accomplish, we were ready to take our proposal to the administrative board and be recognized as an official body (ministry) of the church. It is vital to be "official" and substantiated by the church body. If any new ministry is to be successful while operating under the auspices of a church or religious body, it must be incorporated into that body. This may pose a dilemma because we are not only requesting an administrative stamp of approval on the ministry; we ask that the congregation buy into ownership of the vision. To have the administrative approval without congregational support is analogous to being a minister without ordination from the church body you represent.

Developing Relationships

In an effort to move from the planning to action phase, we explored several prison ministries operating throughout Chicago-land. We wanted to get our

"feet wet" and attempt to develop relationships with groups that were already doing ministry in our area. I was surprised to learn that there were very few African-American churches involved in a consistent effort to minister to those behind bars. Initially, we were met with great resistance in our attempts to partner with those existing groups. We discovered that many of them were ineffective in their efforts to reach out to the incarcerated for three main reasons:

1. Their efforts were inconsistent relative to the amount of time they spent in the institutions. Thus, they were unable to develop trusting relationships with inmates.
2. The teaching methodology was based entirely on doctrinal issues without any regard to the personal needs of the inmates or their families.
3. Financial appropriations for their prison ministry were not a priority in reaching out. Passing out free Bibles and tracts was the extent of their expenditures in many instances.

These experiences helped us to see the need for a total encompassing effort if we were going to be successful as a first-class organization. During this growth period, it was necessary for us to stay fairly close and connected as well as focused on our agenda. What we observed from these groups was not overly inspirational or instructional in the sense that we were expecting. In retrospect, this was a great learning experience for me as well as my church group. We learned how to stay focused, draw our support and energy from within and to encourage ourselves with

the Lord. I would caution you not to be overly critical of many groups that you meet during your sojourn in prison ministry. Many of them are not well organized efforts. They do, however, fill a gap and a need in the lives of some inmates.

The alternative question to ask yourself and focus on is: What happens when nobody shows up? Many of us adopted a posture of affinity towards each other rather than seeing each other as opposition. We began to see a need for each other's existence. Some of these people became our closest friends and allies. Several have joined us in doing multiple daily services, especially at state institutions where the inmate population is currently soaring. It is extremely difficult to do ministry in a hostile and changing environment when you are isolated from other groups. In order to be moderately successful, one must adopt the mind set of having a teachable spirit and not have a "know it all" attitude. I believe that seminary trained ministers must be diligent in working not to project an arrogance into the diverse groups because they may not have the same educational or social advantages that you may have had. I have discovered that all of the cultural and educational advantages mean very little if one does not have an agreeable spirit that allows appreciation and interaction with those who are different. Developing positive relationships with similar groups can develop your ministries' effectiveness. I started inviting some of the members of these various groups to dine with me at breakfast and lunch meetings. I wanted to get to know them and for them to become acquainted with me. There is something very intimate about eating with someone. It allows good communication to be developed beyond the superficial.

This effort finally developed to a point where my group was meeting with other groups. We were able to discuss pertinent issues in a relaxed atmosphere. Once the tension was reduced, we were able to transcend our differences. Later, this led to seminar invitations and training sessions from other unknown groups. It had an accumulative effect of "snowballing" us into the arena of prison ministry in Chicago-land. Through these groups, we met chaplains, guards, wardens, probation officers, judges, lawyers and other major players in the criminal justice system. These results were achieved through the networking efforts of groups we were initially unimpressed with and felt that they had no particular worth to us. When getting started, never overlook individuals and groups because they don't have impressive academic credentials or social standing. These may be the very people through which you gain entrance into the ministry field.

You can only be effective, in the area of prison ministry, via grassroots participation. These people are often the "gatekeepers" of the system and determine who gets in and who remains on the outside. Ministries, like the one led by Rev. Consuela York, have been tested and tried in the fire and have come out like polished gold. They have the **real** key to the hearts of the inmates. This is a closed society, opened only to those who are approved by the "gatekeepers." One word of affirmation or a nod of approval by one of these people insures trust among the inmates and their families. The Biblical reference that speaks about the stone that was rejected by the builder, has become a cornerstone and speaks volumes on this issue. I have found by doing this work, one never knows where your blessing is

coming from.

Angel-Tree Program

As we continued to network outside of our group, we became acquainted with a national group called Prison Fellowship Ministries. This group emphasized a holistic ministry to inmates and their families. Our involvement with them helped me to see the need for an educational component toward our preparation to do prison ministry. Their focus on the spouses and children of the inmates brought us creative avenues to explore new possibilities in reaching our congregation. This prison fellowship offered a five-week, 20 hour training program. It enabled us to break through some of the walls and understand what prison ministry was all about. Each Saturday, the chairperson and I would meet with this group and participate in classroom work. We watched videos on many subjects including practical consideration of the do's and don'ts involved while visiting inmates. This program was the most in depth of any I have discovered nationwide. Once you graduate, most prisons and jails will allow you to enter and do the ministry. I cannot over-emphasize the value of connecting with an established organization.

Prison fellowship gave us the credentials to enter most institutions without a problem. Prisons and jails will not allow untrained persons to enter their facilities on a regular basis. Too many mistakes and improper behavior can result without an understanding of the rules and regulations that govern this particular society. Dress code regulations and boundaries in conversations are very important considerations

in interacting with inmates. We visited county and state institutions and were exposed to their orientation programs as well. All of this required on-the-job training as well as text book preparation that varied from county, state and federal institutions. The laws varied from each particular institution and it was required that you behave properly in each situation. In Cook County jail, we toured the men's and women's divisions. There were different classifications for each group. It was necessary to gain an understanding of how we should behave for each category. Prison authorities are adamant about following the rules, not just for inmates, but for anyone visiting the facility. Rules such as not accepting notes or gifts from inmates must be observed. Refraining from hugs and other intimate gestures are adhered to strictly. These ground rules are very important for us in developing a congenial relationship with the chaplains and the guards who run the prison. Once again, relationships come into play. In order to operate in any facility, it is necessary to be on good terms with the guards and the authorities who run the prison or you will be asked to leave.

My assistant and I graduated from the Prison Fellowship's training program and received an achievement diploma. Later, we were appointed as auxiliary chaplains at Cook County jail. This was a very important opportunity for us to open the door for the rest of our group. We asked the chaplains from Cook County jail to come to our church to instruct and lecture our group on volunteer training. This produced widespread enthusiasm and excitement within our group. I always made certain that invitations were extended to members of the congregation that reflected

a wide spectrum of the church community. My intent was to involve as many persons who represented various ministries throughout the church. I wanted the support and cooperation from as many people as I could. I realized that prison ministry was not everyone's "call," but I wanted the congregation to see the need for them to be supportive of our efforts. These invitations included people from the executive board, deacons, youth ministry and any other group that might serve in a supportive capacity. I wanted these groups to "buy" into this organization from the ground level. Pursuing this objective led to our involvement with the Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree Program. This is a Christmas program that involves congregation members purchasing gifts and toys for the children of inmates. I viewed this as a very important event in communicating my vision of prison ministry at New Faith. Since we are a large church, I wasn't quite sure that the congregation was even aware that we had a prison ministry. Up until this time, only a select group were involved in our planning and implementation. This would be an opportunity to "come out" into the wider church community and find out if we could gain acceptance and support.

One of the problems associated with any large organization is the way information is disseminated. We had, of course, advertised for volunteers in the church bulletin and with fliers. I found, however, that many people do not read information that is given to them. This event would have to be handled in a different way in order to be successful. I began to ask the worship committee to include a space in the service for an announcement about this event. The pastor also

communicated the message about this need in some of his sermons.

We began this process in early November and it lasted until about six weeks before the Christmas season. We formed a publicity committee and placed a Christmas tree in the narthex of the church with the names, ages and requests on it. The response from the church was tremendous, filled with excitement and participation. New Faith's congregation supported over 450 families during that holiday. A wonderful spirit of sacrifice and giving permeated the entire church. I believe that it all added to the festive celebrationis spirit of the whole community. We displayed the gifts which ranged from bicycles to expensive clothing on the church altar for all to see their efforts. This spectacle was viewed with immense pride. I learned at that moment that not only did we have the support of the church community, but we could accomplish anything within reason if our methodology was process oriented.

Administrative ability is a must for any program of this magnitude. If you are not a strong administrator, surround yourself with people who do possess those skills. Our effort was successful largely because I had a ministry chairperson who possessed good administrative skills and had a passion to do the Lord's work. I have discovered that many worthwhile pursuits fail or are received poorly because they are not well thought out. It is important to reflect and develop some strategy in order to accomplish your goal. Discussion with members of your core group is also very important. Leadership requires being out in front, but it also requires delegating responsibility to others.

Cook County Jail

We started our worship ministry at Cook County Jail. This came as a contact through Prison Fellowship. We were initially asked to provide worship for Sunday evening services in Division IV. This division housed youthful offenders who were either awaiting trial or serving short sentences. We were informed by the chaplain that we would be ministering to approximately 400 inmates. We prepared for the first service by selecting individuals who had some testimonial experience and could relate to the inmates. Also, we included a first rate gospel group that provided a positive atmosphere in which to worship. Some of these individuals were members of our church and some belonged to other churches which did not have prison ministry experience, but wished to be included. We were given approximately one hour and forty-five minutes for the service. Our worship format was designed to work within this guideline. I would suggest that you think in terms of who you will be ministering to and select your worship accordingly. A significant number of the target group are church members of some denomination. Many of the inmates are familiar with some of the well known church hymns and songs. They will often join in the congregational singing. Yet, others don't have a clue as to what an order of worship consists of relative to being participants in the service. As you gain experience with the same group, you will begin to know which areas to emphasize and which to limit. As a rule, I tend to do conventional worship services for long-time residents in permanent facilities and I do testimonials, prayer and music at some of the transient facilities. For example, our order of worship at Cook

County Jail was organized as follows:

Brief Statement of Introduction
(included who we were, why we were there, etc.)

Prayer
(accompanied by musical keyboard, if possible)

Two Musical Selections

1st Testimonial (sermon)

Musical Selection

2nd Testimonial (sermon)

Invitation for an inmate to come forward and give a testimony or sing a song

Altar Prayer

Benediction

Our first experience at Cook County Jail was heartily received by the residents. About 400 inmates exploded with applause and appreciation. Needless to say, we were surprised and very pleased with the response. The chaplain had explained to us prior to the service that we might not be received enthusiastically. All of our preconceived notions about these men were transformed. We thought that many of them would just sit there and act disinterested, but we observed many of them on their feet, clapping their hands and worshiping in the same spirited way we worship in church. During altar prayer, which proved to be one of the most moving experiences there, almost three quarters of the men came down and knelt around me. This was a moment that I had never experienced in the environment of

the church. We left Cook County Jail that night with lighter spirits and a strong affirmation that we were on the right track. After arriving back at the church, we held a debriefing meeting. This allowed everyone to express their feelings about what they had experienced. I was delighted to hear the enthusiastic reports from the group. Many expressed a desire to get others from the congregation involved. Praise reports about their experiences circulated throughout the church. Some church members who were ministers and not serving in any ministerial capacity, contacted me and indicated their desire to serve.

Unseating Sitting Ministers

The idea came to me to recruit ministers and others throughout the church who had an interest in preaching and teaching. We identified those individuals and spoke with them about the need for their participation in worship services at the prison. Once again, we were met with enthusiastic responses. Formerly, these preachers just sat in the pews on Sundays and in many instances, went unnoticed. Through this program, we gave them a chance to be recognized and rekindled their gifts to serve. Some were ordained and others were enthusiastic lay people with a desire to preach. We assured them there would indeed be a place for them to serve. For approximately six months, we continued at Cook County Jail, providing workshop services for the inmates. Eventually, this process led us to meet some of the family members of some of the inmates. Through the Angel Tree Program, we had limited contact with the inmates and were prevented from contacting them

directly. Confidentiality is a very important aspect of the justice system. Family information must be revealed to you from the inmates themselves. Developing confidence and trust means that you have to be on the scene operating from a position of integrity and trust at all times.

I discovered that many of the chaplains tried to discourage any contact the female members of our group would have with the inmates. Many members of our prison ministry, including our chairperson, were female. They were deeply insulted by the refusal of one division chaplain to allow them counseling with the inmates. After all, they had gone through the training and now seemingly running into a wall of exclusion. I spoke with this chaplain and he told me that he had encountered too many problems with women ministering in prisons. Furthermore, he didn't believe that women should be ministering in prisons at all. This was the first major obstacle that I encountered relative to discrimination against women in a long time. Perhaps it is because I don't travel in ministerial circles that exclude women from the ministry. I could understand his concern about our female ministers avoiding emotional involvement with inmates, but I couldn't agree with him dismissing them as offenders before they began. I feel that he should have at least given them the opportunity to serve. He refused. This motivated me to inquire about the institutional policies concerning females in the ministry at Cook County Jail. I discovered that the rules made no distinction between the sex of the ministers coming in as volunteers. The chaplain, however, had a right to run his "parish" like a pastor runs his church.

My Dilemma

This was a very anxious time for me. The female members of my group waited to see how I would handle the issue. Here I was, leading a justice ministry into a much needed environment and my group was under attack because of a gender issue. On one hand, I didn't want to alienate my people from me and on the other hand, I didn't want the door closed in our faces. The chaplin explained that he would introduce us to the chaplin of the women's division to see if we could work things out. I consented to meet with the chaplin and discovered to my amazement, the chaplin of the women's division was a man! This really "floored" me. After that experience, the "advocate" in me started to rise. I made several phone calls to my mentor in the Prison Fellowship. He agreed with me and put me in contact with people he thought could assist me. Through my contacts, I was able to exercise pressure from the top. On one occasion, I found myself in the office of a representative of the warden. He explained to me that they had to be careful about who they allowed in the prison. I explained to him that I understood that, but I felt that we at least deserved a chance. We had gone through an accredited training program and possessed credentials. He continued, however, to waiver on the issue. At that time, I felt the need to remind him that I was a minister who represented a 3,000 member church with an impeccable reputation and I didn't believe this would sit well with our congregation. I further informed him that if it was necessary to go public with the issue, I would. He assured me that we could work this out. When I

arrived back at the church, there was a message from the facility. It stated that we could continue doing bible-study and group interaction, but not one-on-one ministry. I saw this as a victory of sorts because it was gained by applying the gentle pressure of confrontation without destroying my support base. I learned through this experience that we had to broaden our vision as it related to our mission. We went into prison ministry with the idea of evangelism and found that this coincided with what the prison administration wanted. The problem was, we agreed on theology, but not on sociology. The same was true correspondingly with Prison Fellowship. We were told that we could only be involved with evangelism and not be a part of any effort to be an advocate for the inmates.

The Philemon Society

After much consideration, we decided to create another wing of our prison ministry that addressed the need for prison advocacy. This was done in response to the many needs that were expressed when we visited or counseled inmates. We could no longer be just involved in evangelism and discipleship without addressing the injustices that many of the inmates had lived with in the prison system. While it is true that God works through his word and prayer, God also works through people who stand up and speak for the powerless. Historically, the African-American church has always been at the forefront in advocating for the powerless and those who are unable to speak for themselves. Theologically, we stood on solid ground in order to do this, but the problem that faced us was the reality that the prison system

will not allow groups to enter prisons and advocate for prisoners.

In response to this, we decided to take a risk and form another group called the Philemon Society. This group would still be under the New Faith Prison Ministry , but it would be separate from the evangelism and discipleship group. Therefore, when the Philemon Society would be involved in expressing or demonstrating against the death penalty or for change against inequality of sentencing or other issues of prison reform, they would be defined as a separate group. Each group will be self contained and have its own individual members.

Through organizing this group with its own separate name, we would not jeopardize the evangelism group's participation with its mission inside the prison. We began organizing this group with people who had expressed an interest in serving initially, but who had felony arrest records that prevented them from serving in the evangelism and discipleship ministry. They were prevented from going inside the walls of the prison because authorities felt that chances for conspiratorial relationships to develop was too great. We wanted people who possessed a passion for advocacy and desire to express that fervor through positive action. The invitation was extended to the congregation during a Sunday worship service and the response was good.

Our core group then interviewed their perspective members to explore their backgrounds and motivations as well as their suitability for this ministry. We began our Philemon Society group with five people. Each of these individuals possessed good communication skills and were highly motivated. Each one saw the need to

engage in a program for change. One of my first instructions to the group was to read, The Autobiography of Malcolm X (Alex Haley. New York: Grove Press, 1965). I chose this book as a starting point to entrench us with a commonality of purpose in approaching this ministry with realism. There are many books that describe the realities of prison life from a person perspective. I would recommend to anyone interested in starting such a group to begin by reading and studying biographies and autobiographies about prison injustices. We then collected articles from newspapers and magazines that chronicled abuse in the prison system. Groups such as Amnesty International are located in every major city. It is a good idea to connect with any of these groups because it will help you get an idea about some of the issues that are involved in an advocacy program. We also contacted other churches in our area to explore the possibility of working together on prison reform issues.

Another place to look, for networking purposes, are colleges and universities. We passed out fliers at one local university and received a positive response. Political science and history departments are familiar with many of these justice issues. One should join and network with groups who share similar ideology on these issues. In fact, our first public demonstration was staged with university students who demonstrated in downtown Chicago against the death penalty.

You should always keep in mind that your ministry should be able to reach beyond congregation membership in order to be effective. We also became involved in writing letters to editors of various newspapers. This approach will guarantee

responses from the community and will open doors to identify groups that are both pro and con on the issues that you raise. This is vital in developing a dialogue with these groups, especially politicians, who are able to develop public policy. One of the positive benefits from this program is seeing individual self improvement. Two women who are housewives, expressed a desire to learn more about the issue of capital punishment. Both of them joined an organization called Toastmasters which is designed to help people develop public speaking skills. Some of the women began pursuing the primary goal of serving as advocates and were thrust into secondary pursuits in their personal lives.

Some of the men began developing relationships with local leaders and became more visible in the community as leaders who voiced their concerns on social justice issues. This group is beginning to reach out into all sections of our community. It will have far reaching effects on the community as it continues to grow.

At present, the consciousness of social justice issues has had a positive effect on the community of faith. It is not unusual for discussions pertaining to prison reform and unfair sentencing issues to be engaged in at other community sites by New Faith members. I believe our prison ministry has tapped into the energy of the wider community in relation to public policy issues. As proof, we are often invited to sit in on discussions throughout the south suburban community relative to issues that affect the quality of life in our community.

Once again, I believe this group has attracted men and women who have a

desire to work on issues concerning fairness and public policy. Some did not feel they could express their concerns within the context of conventional church structure.

The greatest lesson that I have learned from this process is: The leader must always be plugged into the concerns of the group and open to provide the structure for those concerns.

I Am Somebody, Because

At our first group meeting with six women who were spouses of inmates serving long-term sentences, I noticed a strong isolation between the women. There was an air of suspicion in the room and it was difficult to get them to share in a meaningful way. We went through brief introductions and I proceeded to explain what we hoped to accomplish in the group. I planned to conduct the meeting by loosely following the AA 12-Step Program. I believed that approach would contribute to a lively group discussion. It was obvious to me from the body language and the "vibes" in the room that these women were somewhat distrustful of me and my intentions. I explained some of the programs that the church was interested in. However, there was still great reservation during the hour and fifteen minutes we spent together. The first three meetings were all low-key and produced very little group participation.

I decided to invite seven women from our church membership who I knew would be open to the kind of work we were trying to accomplish. These women

were staunch Christians who had the ability to reach out and relate in a warm way. I asked one of them to lead the group by sharing a Christian testimony. The leader was from a church-based ministry called Sisters in Apart. She opened up the meeting by passing out a sheet of paper to each of the participants. She asked them to respond to the phrase "I am somebody, because!" She asked them to think about that while she was giving her testimony. They would discuss their responses during the last fifteen minutes of the meeting. This woman spoke about her shame in being homeless at a certain point in her life. She talked about abuse and isolation and how her outer appearance began to worsen. Then she joked about how physical appearance is so important to ladies and the fact that during that period, she didn't have the resources to even brush her teeth. The group, for the first time, responded to this woman and her testimony. Others began to share what it felt like to experience their own personal shame. Even the middle-class church members joined and shared their experiences of being women in a male-dominated society. Something very powerful and important occurred during that meeting in bringing down the walls. Here was a group of middle-class women with women from the under-class of society sharing a commonality of experiences. It is important that this happened within the context of the church community. We never directly or formally studied scripture but focused on sharing our stories and thinking about solutions. The women exchanged phone numbers and began to develop a chain of support for each other.

I was aware that my leadership role in this group had to be minimal. I

acknowledged that many of these women were sharing and depending on other women for the first time. Their lives had been focused upon pleasing their men. In listening to the stories, I was deeply moved to action. I searched for ways that might assist them in their healing. The most difficult problem I encountered was providing transportation for the group and keeping them motivated. I realized that this was more than I could hope to accomplish. If the group was to continue, it would have to be from the group itself--not from me. Thus, we established the following guidelines:

1. Any woman could belong to the group who had been incarcerated herself or who had family members who were involved in the criminal justice system.
2. Everyone in the group was entitled to confidentiality.
3. All group members had equality and no one person was in charge.
4. Decisions would be made with group consensus.
5. The responsibility of the church would be to provide a meeting place.
6. My role would be to suggest resources that I thought would be valuable to the group and to mediate when there was an impasse.

Personal Stories

I noticed that by allowing the group to tell their own personal stories, it added to the intensity level and the focus of the group. Sharing at such a personal level enabled the group to bond by a reciprocal communion that can only be

experienced by allowing age old family secrets to "come out of the closet."

This provided a catharsis that permitted an atmosphere for members of the group to bear each other's burden. It was not uncommon to see people hug each other and give other visible signs of affirmation after a profound testimony. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of these small groups in forming a strong foundation. They provide the matrix for trust and self-definition in the group process. One main theme of those sharing concerned the feeling of being powerless in dealing with the criminal justice system and being African-American. Through these conversations dealing with the dynamics of power, we discussed what kind of prison ministry we would be. Some stated they didn't think evangelism was enough. They felt we should engage in some form of advocacy to counter a criminal justice system that was unduly oppressive and destructive. Discussions about capital punishment and the need for prison reform were also discussed. In retrospect, these sessions supplied the energy and momentum that pushed us forward. It provided the framework for structuring our efforts toward ministering to the incarcerated. Through this process, I learned the difference between a ministry and a program. The ministry takes into consideration the personal feelings and the individuality that becomes expressive in building human relationships, whereas a program is impersonal and dispenses services with a certain degree of anonymity.

These personal stories also gave us a historical perspective that tied together a memory of all the things we had been through. Some of us spoke about our individual stories and about relatives who had been through the ordeal of prison

only to discover their experiences were not unique. It was discovered that we could all relate by a commonality of experience. Something happened in our group that I can only describe as becoming a true community. We stumbled into a true fellowship by taking a risk with each other. We met once a week, normally on Saturdays for one and one-half hours. Sometimes we would share letters that we had received from inmates that had prayer requests and we would turn the time we shared into a prayer time. Other times, we would try to address requests that inmates made for clothing or supplies. As our meetings continued, more people came and soon we were up to twenty-five people. We encouraged group members to invite lawyers or judges who could be helpful in addressing our feelings of being powerless in dealing with the criminal justice system. This proved to be very fruitful in that we formed a list of attorneys who were willing to serve in a pro-bono capacity and represent some of our clients. Through the process of sharing, we were able to put a structured program together. It provided us with a list of attorneys who were willing to donate three hours a month to help work on cases that involved community service for youthful offenders. Once we received the list of attorneys, we had the volunteers go and develop a relationship with them. The group was now connected with a resource of legal experts who would help us when we needed them. This can easily be accomplished by identifying members in your congregation who are lawyers or by going outside your congregation to legal aid societies. I have found that if you search hard enough, you can find people who are willing to serve in that capacity. Although the program is not working as smoothly

as we would like, it is working. Success takes time and consistent effort.

Sisters of the Yam

My contact with this group motivated me to search for books that addressed self-recovery issues for women. Women who are struggling with issues of forgiveness and reconciliation must be given a strategy in order to deal with their own self-recovery. I was very impressed with author Bell Hooks who wrote Sisters of the Yam - Black Women and Self Recovery. We used this book to address many of the issues that women said they needed to talk about. Members of the group were so impressed with this work that they named their group after the book, Sisters of the Yam. This was an example of how encouraging relationships to be established and allowing the momentum to follow its natural course will shape a group's concern or agenda. There was minimal structure in the group. The only exception was the rules that I asked the group to obey. This environment was healing...beautiful...and refreshing. Healing was evident when members strengthened their community bonds. Positive benefits from this association were also experienced by the women of New Faith. Some said that it brought them closer to what Christianity was all about. The significant issue for me was the connection that broke down the barriers of race, class and suburban versus urban culture. Story-telling, as a mode of communication in developing a therapeutic model, is most beneficial. We called our group Sisters of the Yam. Always allow your group to name itself. Self definition is extremely helpful in building strong relationships.

This group operated for six months before it disbanded officially. This model can be implemented with great success in any church and can be maintained by a good support team. The problems I experienced had to do with transportation and lack of meeting space at the church. When I realized I was powerless in terms of accommodating all the needs of the group, I communicated that to them. They took more responsibility for their own situation and began rotational meetings at individual homes. They had a vested interest in belonging to the group and making things work well. Their philosophy can be described through Audre Lorde's, "Eye to Eye" Sister Outsider:

"We have to consciously study how to be tender with each other until it becomes a habit because what was native has been stolen from us, the love of Black women for each other. But we can practice being gentle with each other by being gentle with that piece of ourselves that is hardest to hold, by giving more to the brave bruised girl child within each of us, by expecting a little less from her gargantuan efforts to excel. We can love her in the light as well as in the darkness, quiet her frenzy toward perfection and encourage her attentions toward fulfillment...As we arm ourselves with ourselves and each other, we can stand toe to toe inside that rigorous loving and begin to speak the impossible--or what has always seemed like the impossible--to one another. The first step toward genuine change. Eventually, if we speak the truth to each other, it will become unavoidable to ourselves.⁸

⁸Bell Hooks, Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery (Boston: South End Press, 1993), 19.

This group is about reconciliation. By telling our stories, which is a form of testimony, we get closer to restoration and healing. What better place for healing to occur than at the church? The wonderful result of story-telling is its benefit to the one who is telling the story as well as the listener. Mwalimu Imura wrote an essay called, "Dying as the Last Stage of Growth" in which he tells about communications:

"We seldom think of conversation as commitment, but it is. I find that expressing what I really feel and telling another person what is actually important to me at the moment is difficult. It requires a commitment on my part to do so, and I sense that this is true for most of us. It is equally difficult to listen. We are usually so full of our own thoughts and responses that we seldom really listen close enough to one another to grasp the real flavor of what the other person is attempting to convey. Creative communication in depth is what allows us to experience a sense of belonging to others. It is the force that limits the destructive potential in our lives and what promotes the growth aspects. Life is a struggle. Coping with a lifetime of change is a struggle, but through a lifetime of change we will experience ourselves as full persons only to the degree that we allow ourselves that commitment to others which keeps us in creative dialogue."⁹

Finally, I believe that if help is to be offered to inmates from the church, the seed must be placed in any fertile ground. Sometimes, hope can be transferred from person to person. When a man goes to prison, his family does time too. The church can be a safe place to heal and grow if we offer our space as a "home place."

⁹Bell Hooks, 16.

Community Service

Once parents became aware of New Faith's prison ministry, many called to inquire if their children could do community service at our church. Some of them had been sentenced to community service because of some misdemeanor or low level felony. We began to selectively choose some of these young men and women, depending on their attitudes, to work with the custodians. It was later decided that we should develop a meaningful program to assist these youngsters in their journey toward fulfilling their commitment.

First, we decided that it would not be our total responsibility to work with these youthful offenders. It was necessary for at least one of the parents to meet with a representative from the prison ministry and they also had to attend the initial meeting. At that meeting, the following things were discussed:

1. If accepted by the church as a community service, the youth and his/her parent must attend at least one worship service or Bible study a week.
2. Lateness or absenteeism without a valid excuse will result in being dropped from the program.
3. The youth must agree to read one book on a Black leader, athlete or entertainer of their choice and write a 300 word essay about that person.
4. The youth must agree to cooperate with the supervisor he/she is assigned to.
5. Both parent and youth must sign the Covenant Card agreeing to participate.

----- **NEW FAITH BAPTIST CHURCH COVENANT CARD (COMMUNITY SERVICE)**

I (name) hereby pledge my support to the church and to the community to do whatever I am asked to do with a positive spirit. I shall be respectful to others as I work towards fulfilling my responsibility.

I (parent) hereby pledge to support my child in his//her endeavor to become a responsible citizen. I will make certain that we both attend at least one worship service or Bible study a week.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Once we have this type of commitment from the youth and parent, we adopt a specialized program for each youth. We believe that consideration should include educational exposure as well as menial tasks. It is important to also include schools who have facilities that can be employed for this service. A fine community service program can be put into place by networking with community organizations. Governor's State University in our area is very helpful to us in this endeavor. They offer us recreational facilities as well as long-term counseling for some of these youths and their families. We were able to initiate our program as a rational consequence of building relationships for community resources and institutions. Some of these youths later joined our church and became involved in our youth ministries.

Joliet Correctional Prison

We expanded our ministry at Cook County Jail to include state institutions. After a few attempts, we were given the opportunity to conduct worship services at Joliet Prison in Joliet, Illinois. Procedurally, we wrote a letter to the head chaplain and informed him of our intent to serve. Additionally, we had other chaplains who we had developed relationships with vouch for the integrity of our ministry. We set up an initial interview with prison officials and discussed the rules they expected us to adhere to.

Background checks of myself and members of our core group were done to screen applicants. Once this was successfully completed, a general orientation was

provided for us. After a two month wait, we were invited to do three worship services on a single Sunday. This proved to be an excellent window of opportunity for our ministry to come into the prison on a consistent basis. We were well received by the inmates and the guards. The worship experience there was tremendous in that both inmates and the worship team connected on a very meaningful level.

We were invited back once a month on a consistent basis. This was quite a success for our ministry because consistent contact with the inmates is the only way that we could develop a relationship. Consistency is the key to developing successful ministry. Inmates always wanted to know whether or not we were serious in our efforts. It seemed that many of them had experienced ministries that only came into the facility two or three times a year. This lack of frequent visiting prevented any meaningful interaction to occur.

After Care

After three months, we began to receive calls from the chaplain and the inmates themselves about serving as a support group for inmates when they exited the prison. Although there are half-way houses and other agencies that support inmates in the transition phase of their release, there are few community groups and churches that act with any real after care assistance.

I observed Muslim converts being picked up at the main gate of the prison upon their release. It appears that Muslims have a program that includes not only

evangelism, but complete after care that provides ex-inmates with clothing and residence. One complaint that we heard often was that Christian groups loved to preach to the inmates during Sunday services, but after an inmate was released, he/she was on their own. Support for these men and women just wasn't there from Christian institutions.

Clothing Closet

In an attempt to respond to this need for clothing, we began to organize a "clothing closet." We collected clothing from a variety of sources and this allowed us to welcome ex-inmates with several changes of clothing when they left the institution.

It is important for the reader to understand that the clothes must be clean and neat. Self image and esteem in most cases, has been drained out of most inmates when they are admitted back into society. This should be kept in mind instead of projecting an attitude to the inmate that he/she should be grateful for any old "hand me downs." Most are extremely grateful, but they expect to be treated as you would like to be treated. Our church body was so supportive in this area that we had to find an off-site location to store all the clothing that we collected. Congregational members who had relatives soon to be released contacted us and took advantage of our services. Especially noteworthy is the fact that our off-site storage center is located in the basement of a husband and wife team who heard about our ministry and offered their services. Neither are members of our church,

but wanted to be supportive of our efforts.

This program can be administered very simply by asking donors to either contribute dry cleaned clothing that is in good or excellent condition or simply donate new clothing. We ask that our members not give old or out of style clothing. When we are contacted by the ex-inmate, we make sure they are provided with dress clothing and shoes along with at least three changes of casual clothing.

Temporary Job Service

Many ex-inmates that we come into contact with, express a desire to find some type of employment. Some, who are supported by family, work with us to attempt to place that person in some meaningful work. Our church is willing to work with any individual or family member to achieve that end, but it is very important that ministry leaders contact the client's parole officer or probation worker to assist in this effort. Before the church can recommend an ex-offender to a position, it must have all the background information about the person. Honesty and straight forwardness are the only ways to go on this issue. Family members cannot always be depended upon to communicate the whole truthful history of their loved ones. In fact, some of them offer a jaundiced impression of the person they are trying to help get re-established in society. We insist upon honesty and are "up front" in communicating this to the ex-inmate and their family members.

Initially, we contacted people in our congregation who owned businesses or who were aware of job opportunities at the company where they worked.

New Faith already had an employment ministry, but this posed a different challenge. I discovered that most employers did not want to employ an at-risk person. Some said they would rather hire someone who was more deserving. In our efforts to deal with this problem, my ministry chairperson and myself contacted a temporary employment agency. We discussed what we were attempting to do as it related to job opportunities for ex-inmates. The Executive Vice-President of the company expressed a desire to work with us. This company employed people on industrial sites and warehouses along with some clerical work. It was suggested that if we came up with a screening program for referring applicants, the company would work with us. I met with a group of personnel specialists who are congregational members and created the following screening program:

1. Each ex-offender must attend three two-hour sessions and learn to prepare a written resume.
2. Each ex-offender must attend a mandatory one-hour motivational seminar with emphasis on job punctuality and attendance.
3. Each ex-offender must attend a two-hour counseling session with family members in order to create a "genogram."

After these conditions are satisfied, he/she is then recommended to the temporary service for employment. During the last year, we successfully referred sixteen candidates. It is important to point out that in order to meet the requirements of the screening process, referrals are made to outside agencies also. Existing programs must be found because of the heavy workload in dealing with each client.

Governor's State University, which is in our community, offers free

counseling to residents. We contacted them and arranged for them to have their graduate students assist us in providing a "genogram" for our process. Job Corp, which is a federal program, conducts bi-weekly resume preparation classes free of charge. Once we meet initially with the candidate and make appointments with these agencies, it eliminates the need for us to duplicate a program that already exists. This saves staff time and enables us to be more efficient. Additionally, it brings other community organizations into the equation in order to solve the immediate problems.

Once again, relationships are the key to solving some of these immense problems. No one individual or group has all of the answers, but I am convinced that the church is in the position to bring community resources in that will focus on these problems.

CHAPTER VIII

EVALUATION OF MODEL

This model began development in my mind in December 1992. It was the result of issues and problems that congregational members brought to my attention. Throughout my professional career, issues relating to men and women in jail continued to resurface and plague the community of Faith.

Nobody seemed to know what to do in response to this issue of incarceration as a church body. Some parishioners visited inmates during holidays and others would occasionally remember the incarcerated during public prayer. The names of these people and their families, however, remained a church secret. Congregational members would whisper among themselves about who, what, when and where it occurred, but largely communication went "underground" in the church body. There was no organized or systematic effort to address these issues in the last three churches in which I served. Although African-Americans represented the majority of inmates who inhabited the prisons and jails of our county, no prison ministry program was identifiable in most congregations. When I arrived at New Faith, there was no prison ministry and the congregation expressed no desire to participate in one.

I listened to congregational stories and identified persons who I believed would be interested in developing a prison ministry at the church. We began meeting in small groups and through a gradual process, we were able to implement

the model we have in place today. This model can be implemented in any church that has an outreach component. There must be emphasis on getting beyond the walls of the church in order to be effective. Churches that emphasize worship and study within the context of four walls can be challenged to grow and develop methodologies for limited involvement in this model.

There are many churches that could duplicate this model in its entirety and others that can adopt one component and still be successful. No matter what size or denomination the church may be, you could be successful by choosing one area in which it would be willing to minister. I believe we were successful in implementing the prison ministry at New Faith because we "sold" it to the congregation. Having the congregation embrace "ownership" of the idea is a necessity. Prison ministry cannot be forced on a congregation; it must be process oriented to fit the needs of your particular church.

Some churches may see a need to get involved only in a preaching ministry at prison facilities and not participate in an after-care program. Adoption of the complete model is not necessary in order to experience success in this ministry. If you adopt one component of this model, your congregation will in time grow into other phases. The important thing is to start somewhere and expose your congregation to the ministry. Congregations believe that churches should be involved in prison ministry because of the Biblical and Theological mandates to do so, but a much smaller percentage of ministry workers can be extracted from that group to do the real ministry. The congregation often remains supportive of your

efforts in an indirect way. For instance, our Angel-Tree Program, which provided gifts and food to over 450 families during the Christmas holiday, was a splendid success (see survey). In that program, New Faith Baptist Church was recognized as the second largest contributor of African-American churches in the nation. This was our first involvement in the program and our success was due to the supportive efforts of our congregation of whom most have never set foot in a jail or prison.

We developed a questionnaire aimed at our congregation to measure the interest, participation and our involvement with this newly formed prison ministry. We surveyed 500 members of our congregation and asked how many of them were willing to be supportive of our prison ministry. Approximately 390 out of 500 members contributed both gifts and food to our Angel-Tree Program, while 90 individuals just donated food and 20 donated gifts (see Graph 2). This overwhelming support contributed to our huge success.

On the other hand, when we posed the question about the possibility of participating in a more direct way, the numbers dropped. In another survey question, we asked how supportive would you be in sponsorship for the prison ministry? There were 80 members who said they would be willing to participate directly, 219 said they had good feelings, but would not directly participate in the ministry and 201 said their interest would be poor (see Graph 3).

I came to the conclusion that while many are supportive of the work, they don't want to be involved in the front line of the ministry. This is not alarming because in most churches, it has been estimated that 20% of the congregational

members do most of the church work. I was pleased to note that 399 members out of the 500 polled, felt very good and believed that the ministry of the church should include those in prison. Also, 101 members felt good about our participation (see Graph 4). There were 275 members out of 500 who believed that the prison ministry had been an asset to the church while 150 felt good and 75 felt that we should involve our efforts elsewhere (see Graph 5). The most satisfying result for me was the fact that 491 of the respondents were aware that we had a prison ministry (see Graph 6). This demonstrates that we have been very effective in developing a ministry that is breathing, existing and touching the life of the church. Members are proud that we have a prison ministry and believe that it is an asset to the church. Although a small percentage of members compose the prison ministry itself, we have widespread church support for our endeavors. The excitement that this ministry has generated will bring wider participation in the community of faith. We are not only attracting individuals, but families as well.

This was demonstrated in our employment program which provided jobs for inmates and their family members. Other family members also contacted us to see if we could place a relative who was leaving prison. At the time of this writing, we were able to get jobs for 12 inmates and four family members. This was an exciting task--to be able to begin establishing a working after-care program. The number may seem small, but it provides a beginning for us to branch out and develop into the marketplace.

Even more encouraging was the discovery that the overwhelming majority

of ex-inmates whom we interacted with, felt they had been well received and that we did a good job for them. Although most of these positions were in light industry with no real future, they provided temporary positions that could lead to other opportunities. Out of the 16 individuals employed, only one is now unemployed (see Graph 7), five went on to better jobs and 10 are still working in the temporary service. The important point is that they are constructively involved and on a road to a more productive future.

Our preaching teams which are composed of men and women who have been activated from the pews of our church, have done a fine job. We were able to activate ministers who didn't have the opportunity to preach. Now, they are intensely involved in bi-monthly services at the county jail and once a month (three times a day) at Joliet Correctional Institution. The feedback has been invigorating and has had a rippling effect in touching others to visit inmates. Recently, we took a group of 12 members who participated in a workshop to the Joliet facility. We did three services there and the experience was profound for all who participated. The group, Sisters of the Yam, has provided me with a much deeper understanding of the grief and depression that many women experience in their relationships with men. I had to truly search my soul and struggle with the dynamics of male patriarchy and its consequences with regard to women who have men in prison.

I realize to a great extent, these women must have strong support systems in order to survive and recover from these devastating experiences that have caused them suffering. I have also come to the realization that perhaps this group will be

the most difficult to keep. We could have done a more effective job with this interactive group if we had the means to provide transportation and child care. Often, some of these women were not able to participate because of these reasons. This might be a consideration for anyone who is thinking of starting one of these groups. I can't emphasize enough the importance of maintaining these groups as support mechanisms for these women. The results can be very rewarding. On the other hand, I have learned that it takes time to develop any ministry. One should not get frustrated at the inability to accomplish all that you hope to immediately. While some areas of our ministries flourished, other areas suffered.

Initially, I proposed developing a youth program that would help children of the inmates. Since New Faith has extensive youth ministries, I thought it would be a fairly simple solution to refer these troubled youth to our existing programs. This however, did not prove to be true. This was one area in which I experienced less than moderate success. Many of the youth that I tried to include in the life of the church were not inclined to stay. Some were not motivated to work within a church atmosphere. I believe one of the reasons we were not able to successfully recruit these youth was because most had been referred to us by social workers or probation officers. They viewed their time at church as "serving time." Perhaps, we could have been more effective if we did not recruit, but allowed them to come of their own free will.

In retrospect, in order to be successful, we must not be so program orientated until we lose sight of developing relationships that take time and effort. I

am proud of the fact that we developed our community service program to the extent that we were networking with other community institutions. This trek into the wider community provided a common base for shared responsibility. Shared responsibility insures greater success.

The most unique part of our prison ministry is the advocacy component. Most prison ministries focus upon the evangelical and discipleship model. This model is so unique because we are able to engage our resources on two different levels. Evangelism and discipleship are so very important in communicating the Gospel, but there must be some apparatus for translating belief into action.

The Philemon Society enabled us to challenge the unfair treatment of inmates along with a deep abiding commitment for change. This structure also allowed us to plug into the prophetic tradition that is the history of the African-American church. Theologically, it enabled us to confront the powers and the principalities of this world without maintaining the status quo. We have marched in demonstrations against the death penalty and have organized letter writing campaigns to protest unfair laws. What I didn't realize was that we attracted people who possessed communication skills and wanted to involve themselves in this type of ministry. Some of these people did not see themselves in the role of preaching or teaching, but could define themselves in advocacy. When I began this task, I did not envision the ministry evolving into the model that it has become. Through this process, I have arrived and developed into a first class minister. Developing and interacting within my context site has brought many fruitful associations. This has

spilled over into my personal life and has added to the vitality and spirit of my home.

I credit the success of this project to the support that I have received from my wife and children.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Every ministry vision, no matter how complicated, begins with the interaction of a few people working together to bring about that vision. I believe in the integrity of the group process. When people bring their concerns to the table, express their honest thoughts and are truly listened to and embraced, the results can be tremendously creative.

Taking a risk is part of being a leader. Lack of courage and failure of nerve results in a posture of "business as usual."

If we as leaders are going to move forward into new territory and change paradigms, we must listen to that gentle voice inside of us that pushes us beyond our comfort zones and quiet conformity of the familiar. To be able to do something that you love and do it well is one of the most satisfying things in the world when you are doing it with other people.

To develop and implement a prison ministry in a church is one of the most enriching things that a congregation can experience. Many remain unaware of the rich fruits of the spirit that can be experienced by ministering to persons that nobody wants to touch or going to places that nobody wants to go.

The central issue has been and always will be about building relationships. Building relationships with people and institutions will ensure your success in any endeavor or pursuit. We must condition ourselves through the power of the

Holy Spirit to go through unpleasant circumstances and be able to see the "light" at the end of the tunnel. There are no easy solutions to life's problems. We must dig deeply into the problems of life before we can get to the enriching "water of life." Problems in our professional ministry and personal lives require us to develop a tough mental posture that says, "I can go through the tough times of today because I know what tomorrow brings."

To a large degree, all systems for this ministry are in place. Excitement from this activity has generated enthusiasm throughout the church community.

My personal goals have included learning everything I can about prison life. I have developed rich insight by talking to inmates, guards and wardens who direct the programs at the county, state and federal levels. These opportunities were afforded to me by developing relationships with individuals who work in the prison system. It required going through a series of courses and attending jail on a weekly basis.

In addition, I have been reading everything I can get my hands on relative to my subject. This study has increased my desire to involve myself on a deeper level of participation in prison ministry. It also affords me the privilege to pursue a deeper self recovery for myself.

In conclusion, I would like to salute my dear uncle, Mr. Charles Lyons, who was my first inspiration for soul searching and the desire to find the deepest meaning in life. Following is what I envision his response would be to my letter:

Dear Richard,

When I read your letter, I felt as though a spring which had long ago dried up, began to produce the first drops of water. Your words are like arrows of light that have traveled through eternity to rest in my heart.

For a long time, I expected no response from my family because I was mentally wiped out by the misery which confronted me daily. The pain of never hearing a familiar voice of childhood or seeing a familiar face, stretched out into months and years. I held on to faded photographs that never spoke to me, except in the deep recesses of my mind.

Never shall I forget the loneliness and the isolation I felt on holidays when no one showed up. Christmas and Easter became mere dates upon the calendar that marked the stripping away of myself. Gradually, this separation from my family caused a deep hole in my soul. That hole became filled with demons that attempted to destroy my faith forever. All of this happened to me, yet I never forgot you or others in my family. Many times I felt like my own mother had abandoned me and there was no one to hold me.

My suffering and my stories remain untold to human ears. I have no one to cry for me and my life has become a footnote on the margin of history. To the world, it is as if I never existed except for a birth and a death certificate. No one knew of my talents, gifts, wonderful sense of humor or my capacity to be a friend to the friendless. For years, I hurt deep inside and I thought there was no way to fix the pain. I felt betrayed and left alone. My dreams were turned into dust because,

nobody came.

I kept trying to grasp things around me, attempting to find meaning for my life, hoping that whatever I grasped could grasp me too. I discovered that no experience is more powerful than the glance, the interplay of eyes, the looking at someone who is looking at you or the experience of not being seen.

The need to be seen and recognized gives meaning to everybody's life even if you are locked away in some prison or a place where nobody wants to be. Everything else such as food, shelter and being warm means little unless you "mean."

God has allowed the Holy Spirit to travel through the gulf that separates us because your heart is right. You bring me such an incredible gift after all these years. I am glad that model ship brought you to a place in the mind of God where the poor are not forgotten.

Press On,

Lyons

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114

NEW FAITH BAPTIST CHURCH
ANGEL TREE/PRISON MINISTRY SURVEY TALLY
(See Attached)

The church membership is an estimated 3,500 members -- of which 500 completed and returned this survey. Each question was tabulated and the following totals were received:

1. How did you participate in the Angel Tree Program?
390 answered very good (*gift and food participation*)
20 answered good (*gift only participation*)
90 answered poor (*food only participation*)
2. Did you feel good about New Faith's involvement in Prison Ministry?
400 felt very good
98 felt good
2 felt poor (*we should have done more*)
3. Do you think Prison Ministry has been as asset to New Faith?
275 very good (*spiritual effect*)
150 good effect (*spiritual effect*)
75 poor asset (*spiritual effect*)
4. Would you be willing to participate in Prison Ministry in a supportive/
sponsor capacity?
80 very good sponsorship
219 good sponsorship
201 poor sponsorship
5. Do you believe that part of the mission of the church is to minister
to those in prison?
399 very good (*church should minister*)
101 good (*church should minister*)
0 poor (*church should minister*)
6. Were you aware that New Faith has been involved in
Prison Ministry?
80 very good awareness
411 good awareness
9 poor awareness

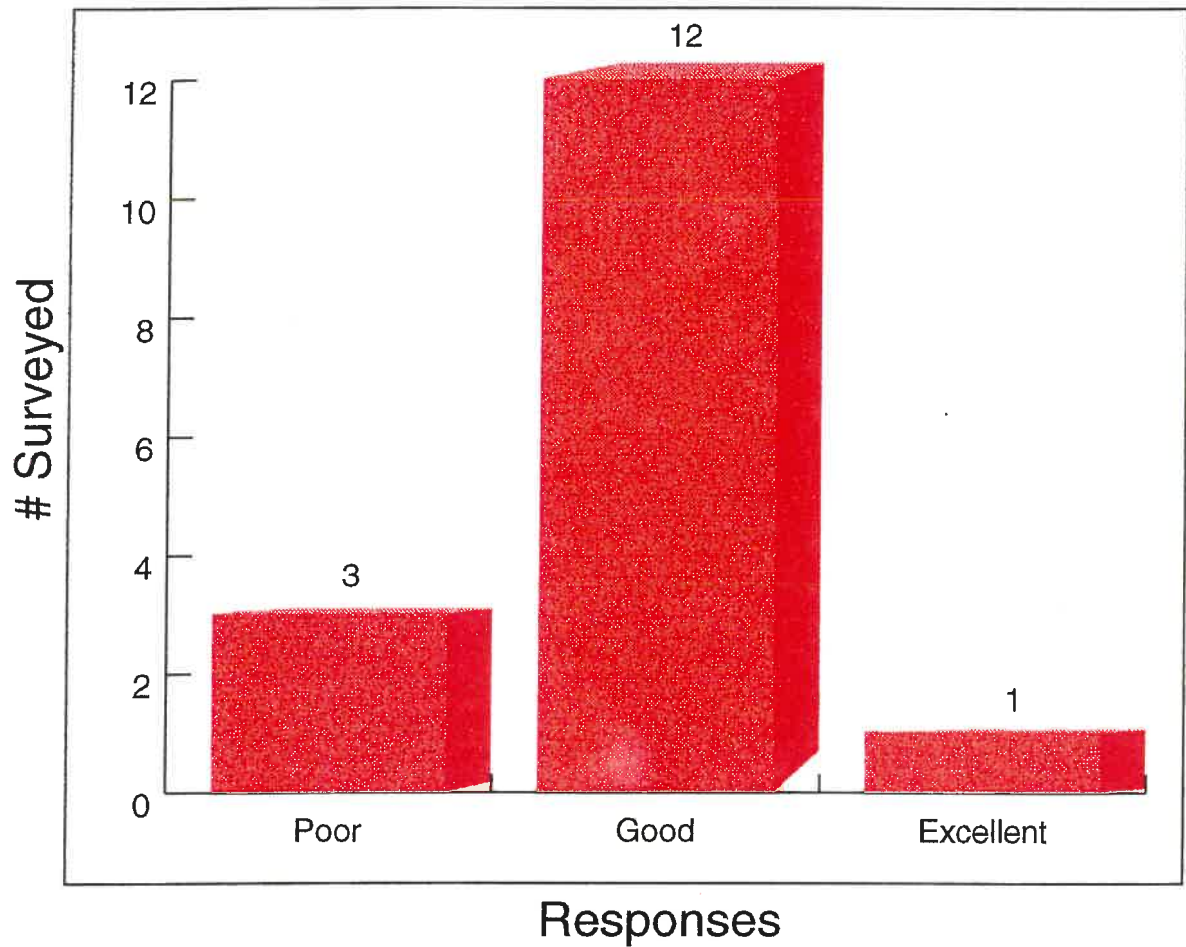


APPENDIX

Graph 1

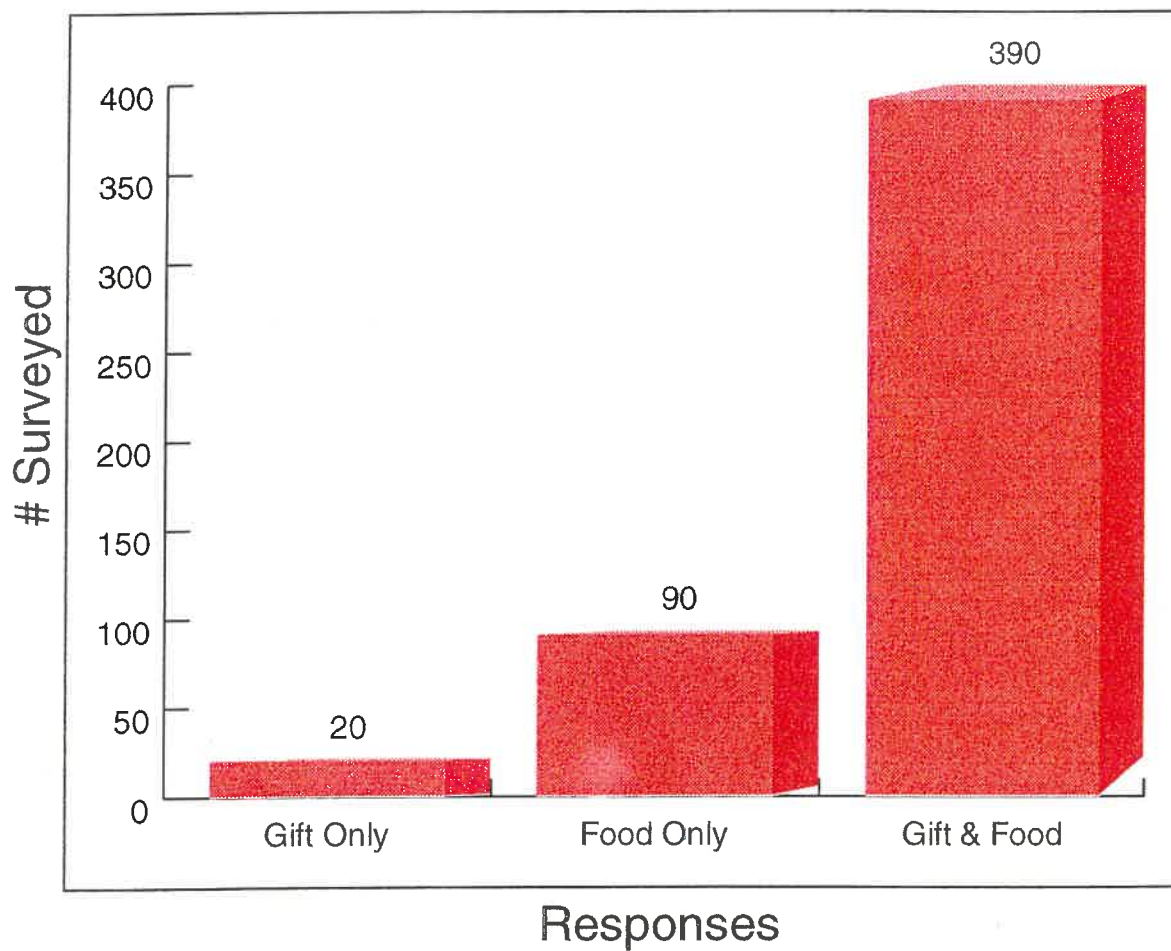
Did NFBC Assist You to Find A Job?

Prison/Employment Ministry 16 Participants



Graph 2

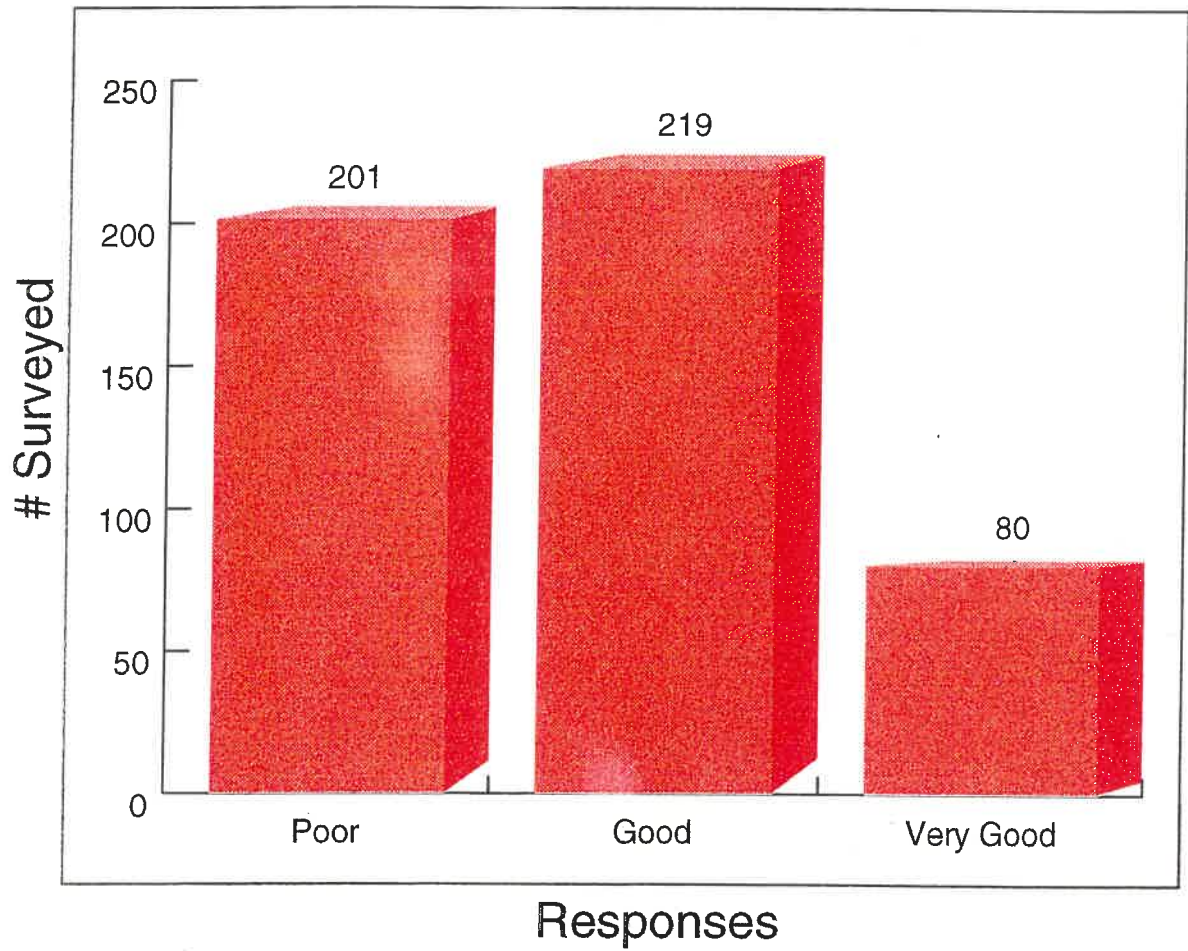
How Did You Participate In the Angel Tree Program?



Graph 3

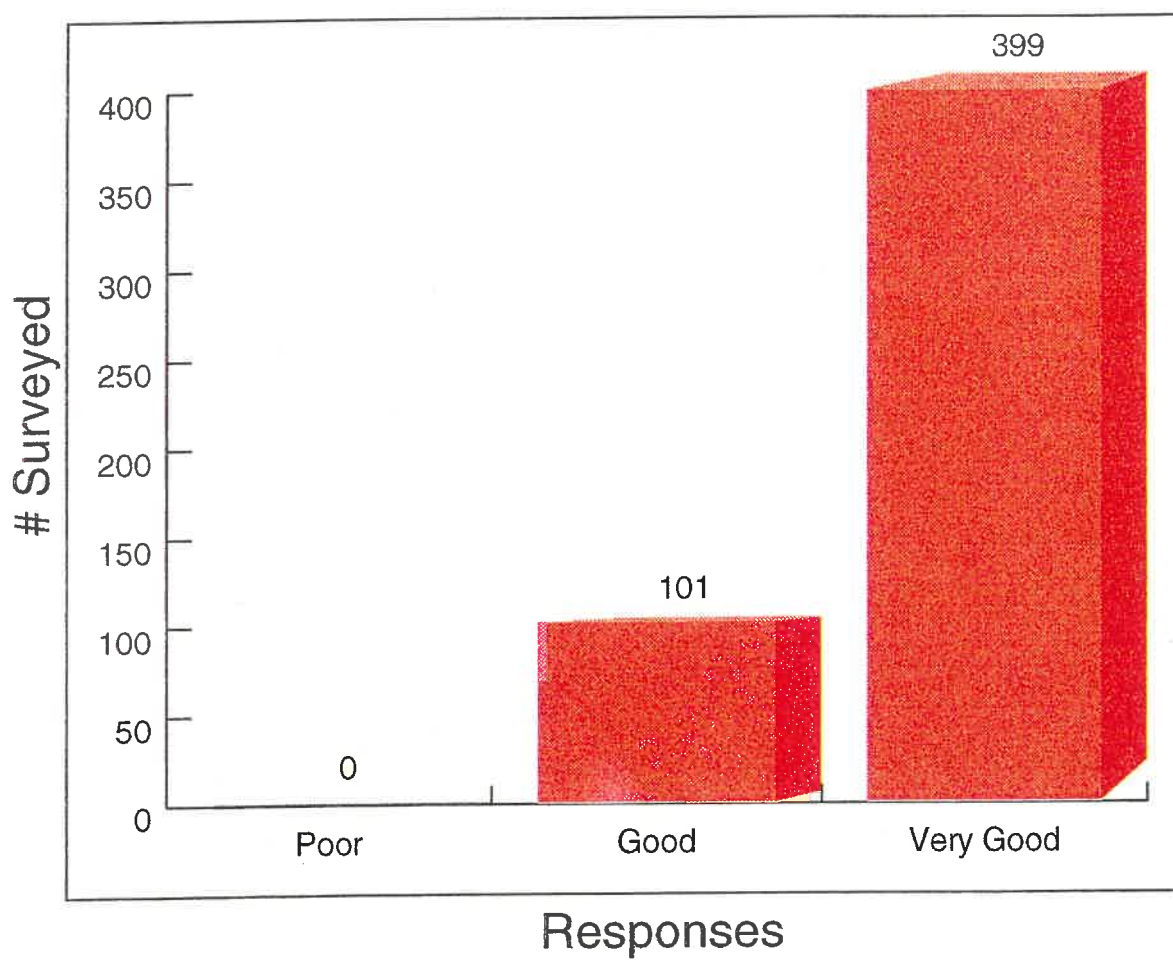
What Is Your Willing Supportive

Sponsorship to the Prison Ministry?



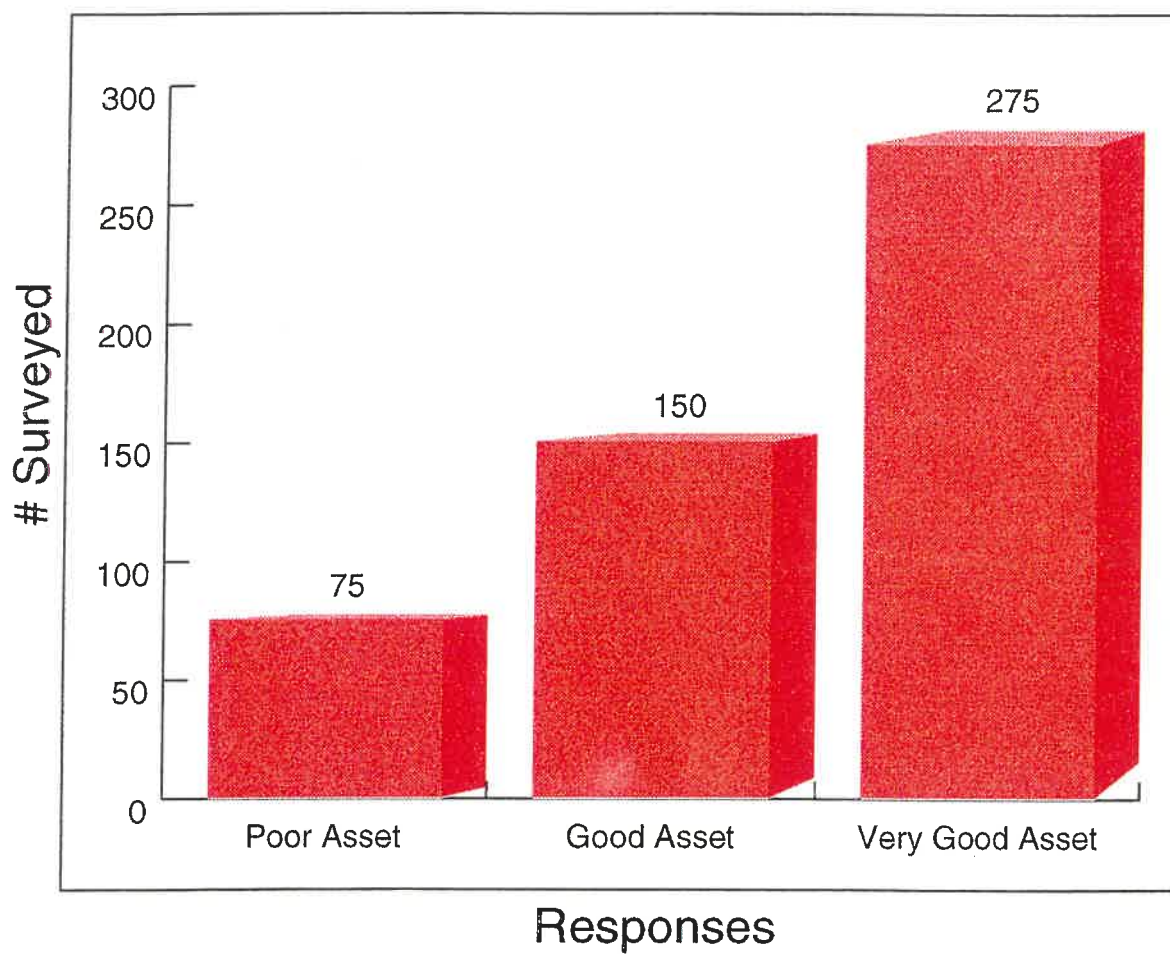
Graph 4

Should the Ministry of the Church Include Those in Prisons?



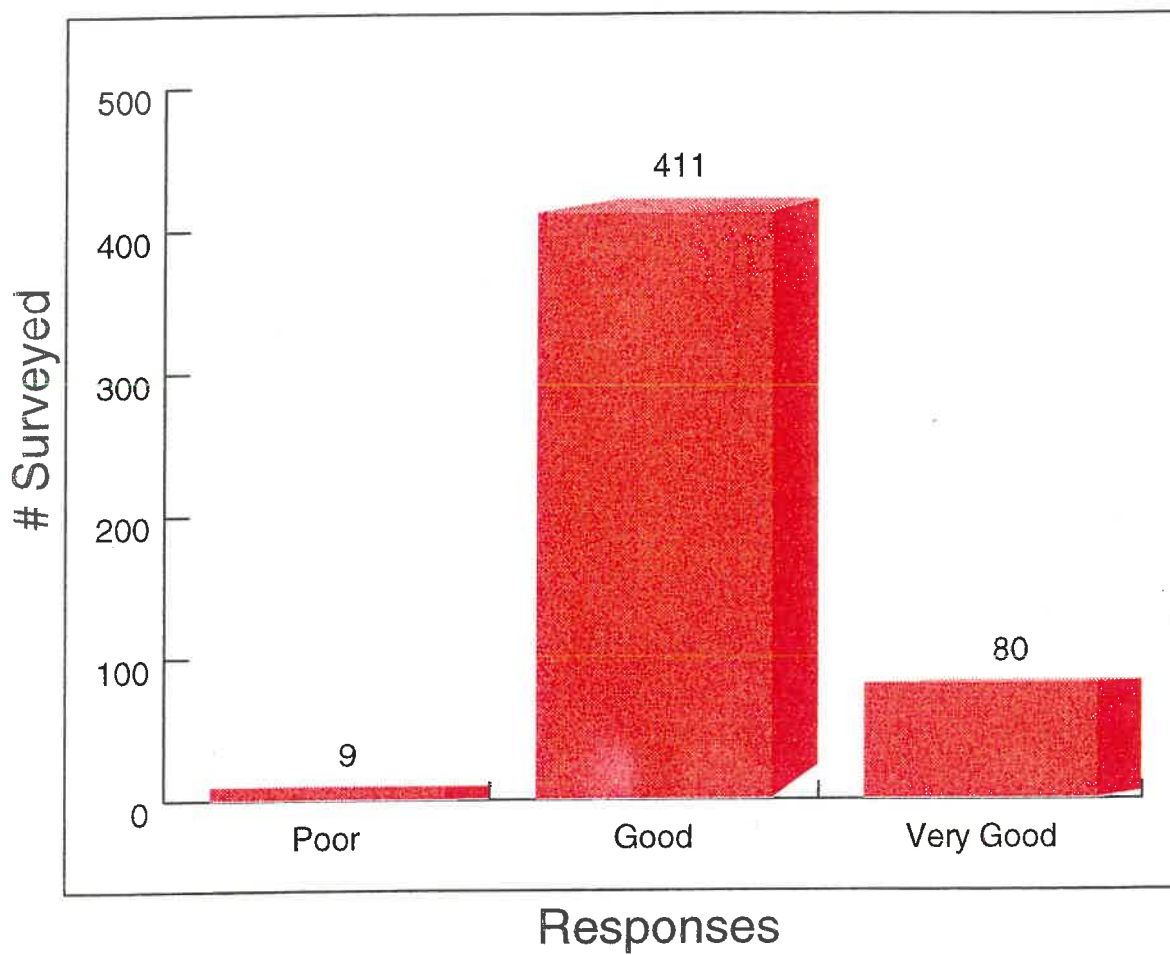
Graph 5

Has The Prison Ministry Been an Asset to New Faith?



Graph 6

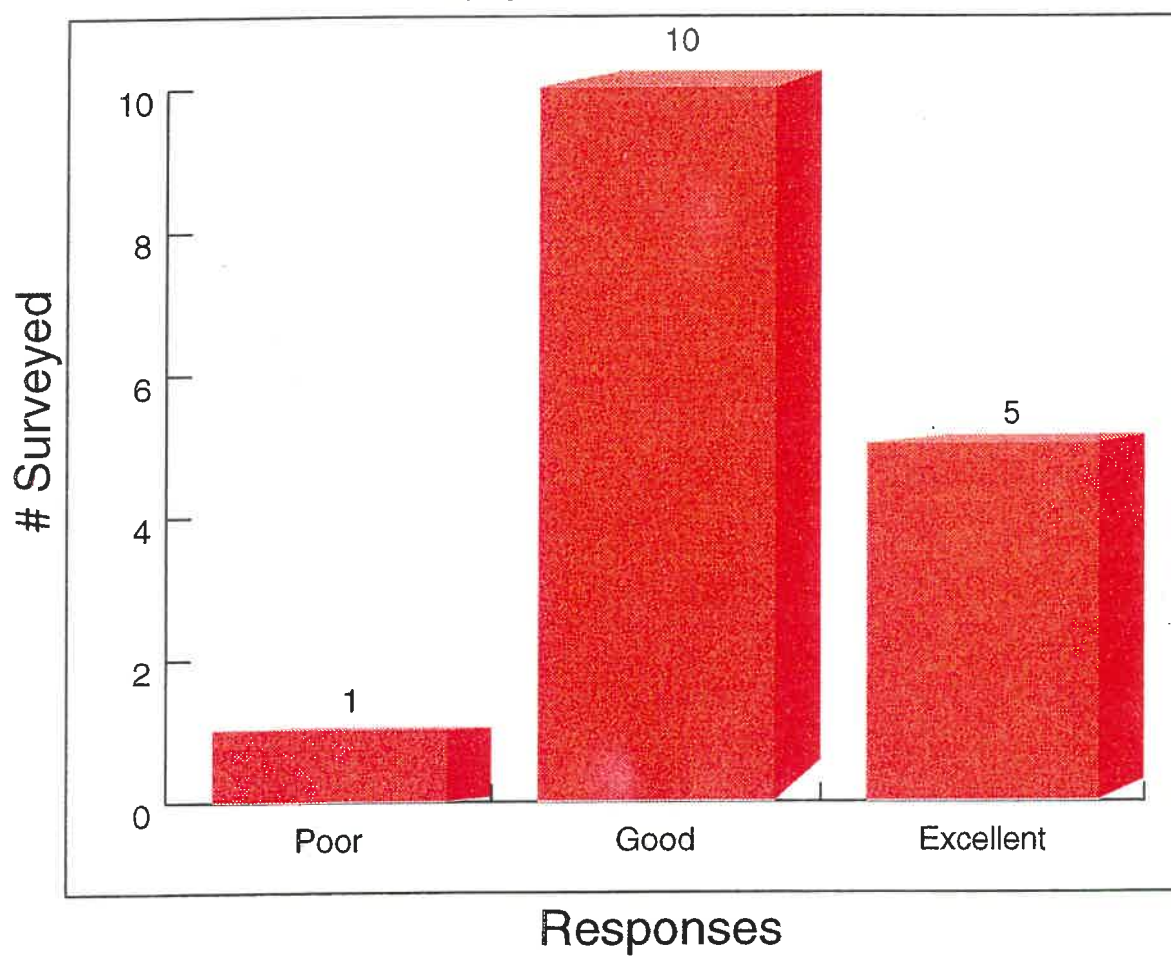
Are You Aware of NFBC'S Prison Ministry?



Graph 7

Are You Still Employed?

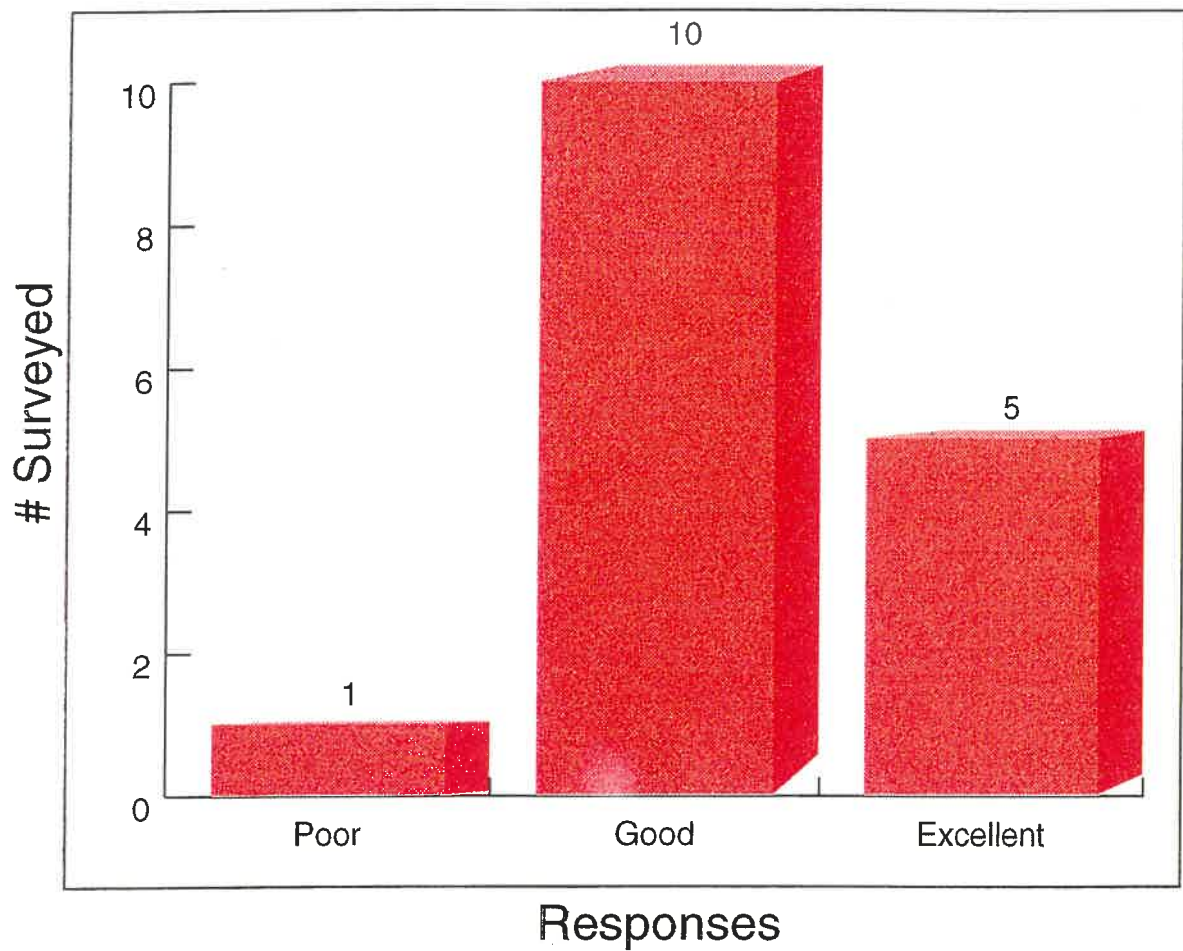
Prison/Employment Ministry 16 Participants



Graph 8

How Do You Feel About NFBC?

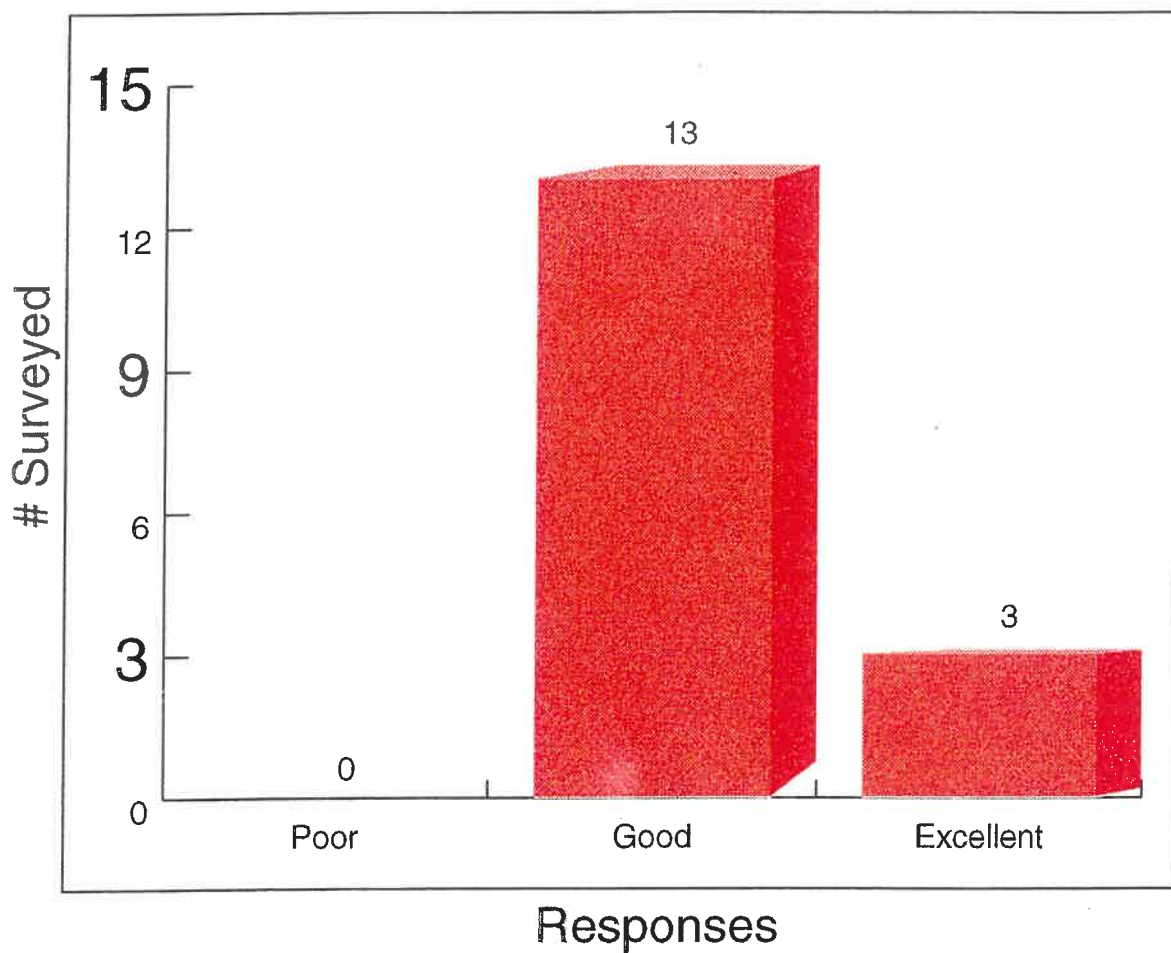
Prison/Employment Ministry 16 Participants



Graph 9

How Were You Received At NFBC?

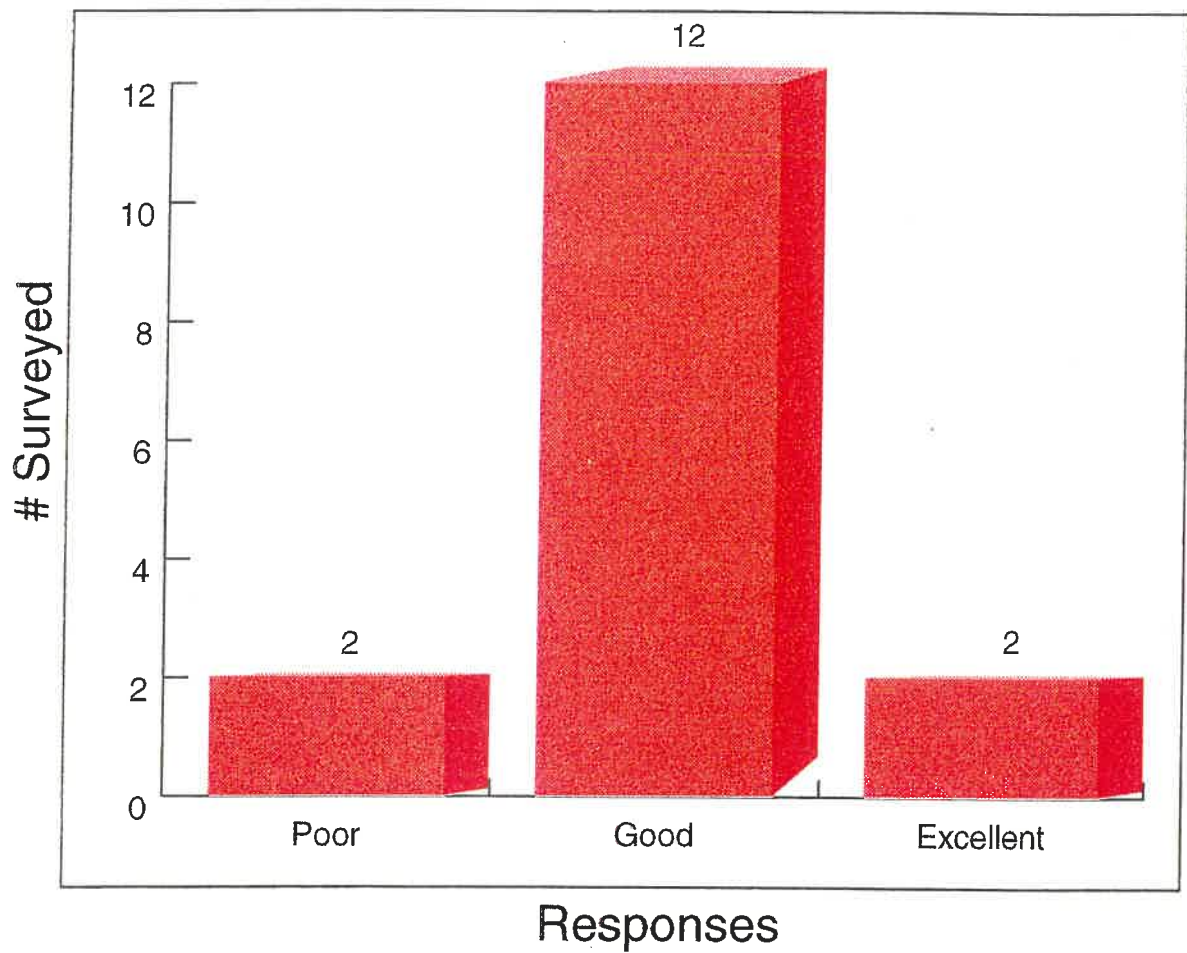
Prison/Employment Ministry 16 Participants



Graph 10

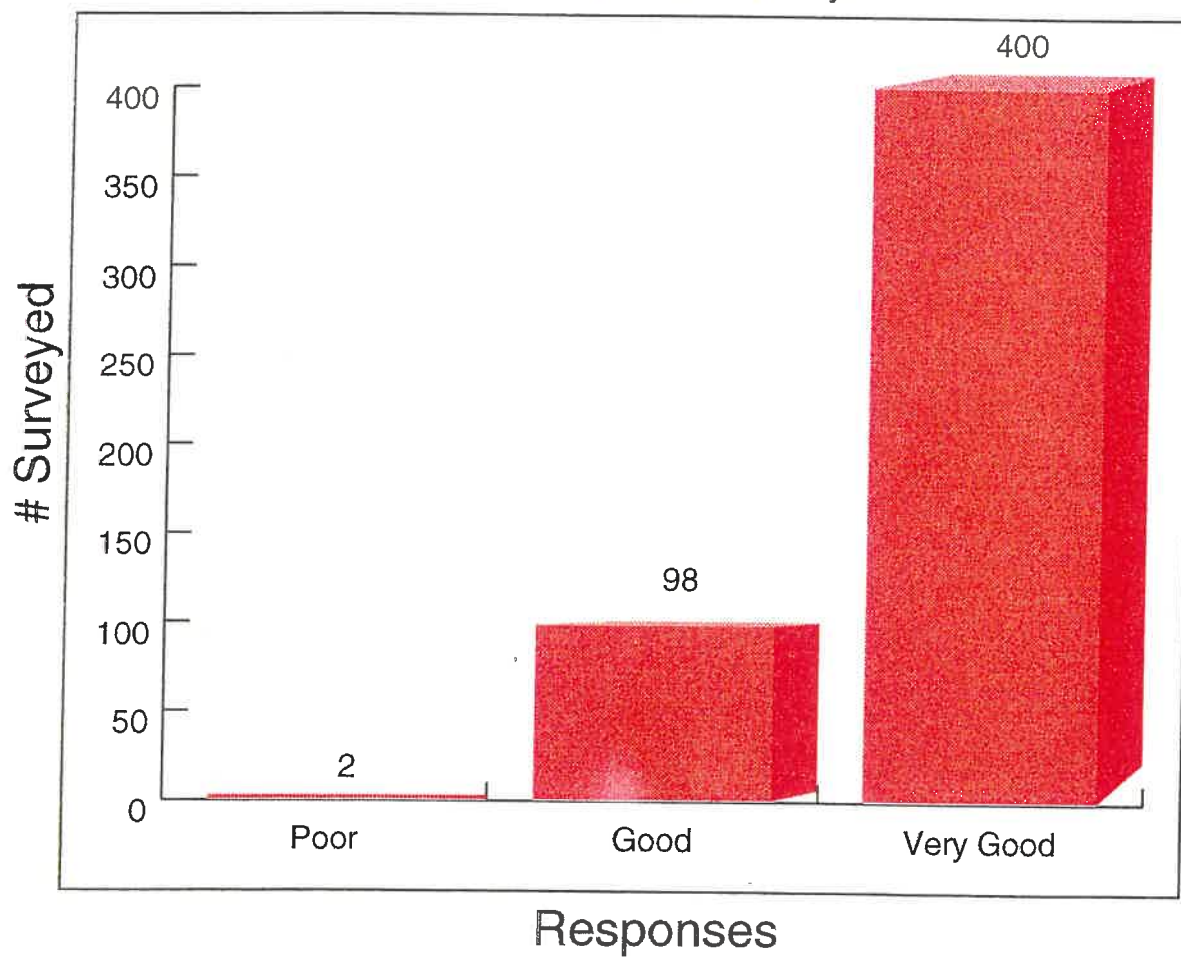
How Do You Feel About Your Job?

Prison/Employment Ministry 16 Participants



Graph 11

How Did You Feel About New Faith's Involvement in Prison Ministry?



CHAIRPERSON PERSON: Rev. Vera. M. Stewart
EFFECTIVE DATE: September 1994
WRITTEN BY: Rev. Richard M. Bundy, Jr.

1. Title of Ministry: Prison Ministry Fellowship
2. Scripture: [Jesus said] "I was in prison and you came to see me. Because you did it to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done it to me. Matt. 25:36-40.
3. Purpose of Position: The prison ministry is a fellowship of men and women who, motivated by their love for the Lord Jesus Christ and in obedience to His commands have joined together to exhort and assist the church in the prisons and in the community in a ministry to prisoners, ex-prisoners and victims, and their families involved to promote biblical standards of justice in the criminal justice system through evangelism and discipleship.
4. Assigned Ministry Area: Justice Ministry
5. Relates Closely With: Pastoral Staff Team, Ministerial Staff Team, Music Ministry, Youth and other family ministries at New Faith Baptist Church.
6. Responsible For: Implementing and coordinating the functions of the New Faith Prison Ministry Fellowship through Training.
7. Continuing Responsibilities: Evangelism and discipleship
 - a. Worship and Preaching
 - Lead/Assist in the prison congregation worship
 - Preach in the prisons/jails as scheduled with the chaplain offices.
 - b. Teaching
 - Bible study to the families of prisoners and ex-prisoners.
 - c. Visitation to the prisoners, homes of prisoners and ex-prisoners.
 - d. Counseling
 - participate in counseling sessions with families of prisoners
 - participate in counseling with prisoners
 - participate in counseling with ex-prisoners
 - e. Administration
 - To identify and assist families with special needs to appropriate New Faith Justice ministries.(i.e. youth ministries, women self-esteem groups)
8. Role Preference: Trained, licensed and certified as a Prison/Aux Chaplain through Prison Ministry Fellowship.

9. Top Three Measurable Goals For Next Three Months:

- a. Train New Faith Membership in prison ministry counseling and visitation.
- b. Adopt families of prisoners, ex-prisoners and establish bible study times with them through New Faith.
- c. Plan trips to professional ball games with the families of prisoners and ex-prisoners.

10. Budget Available:

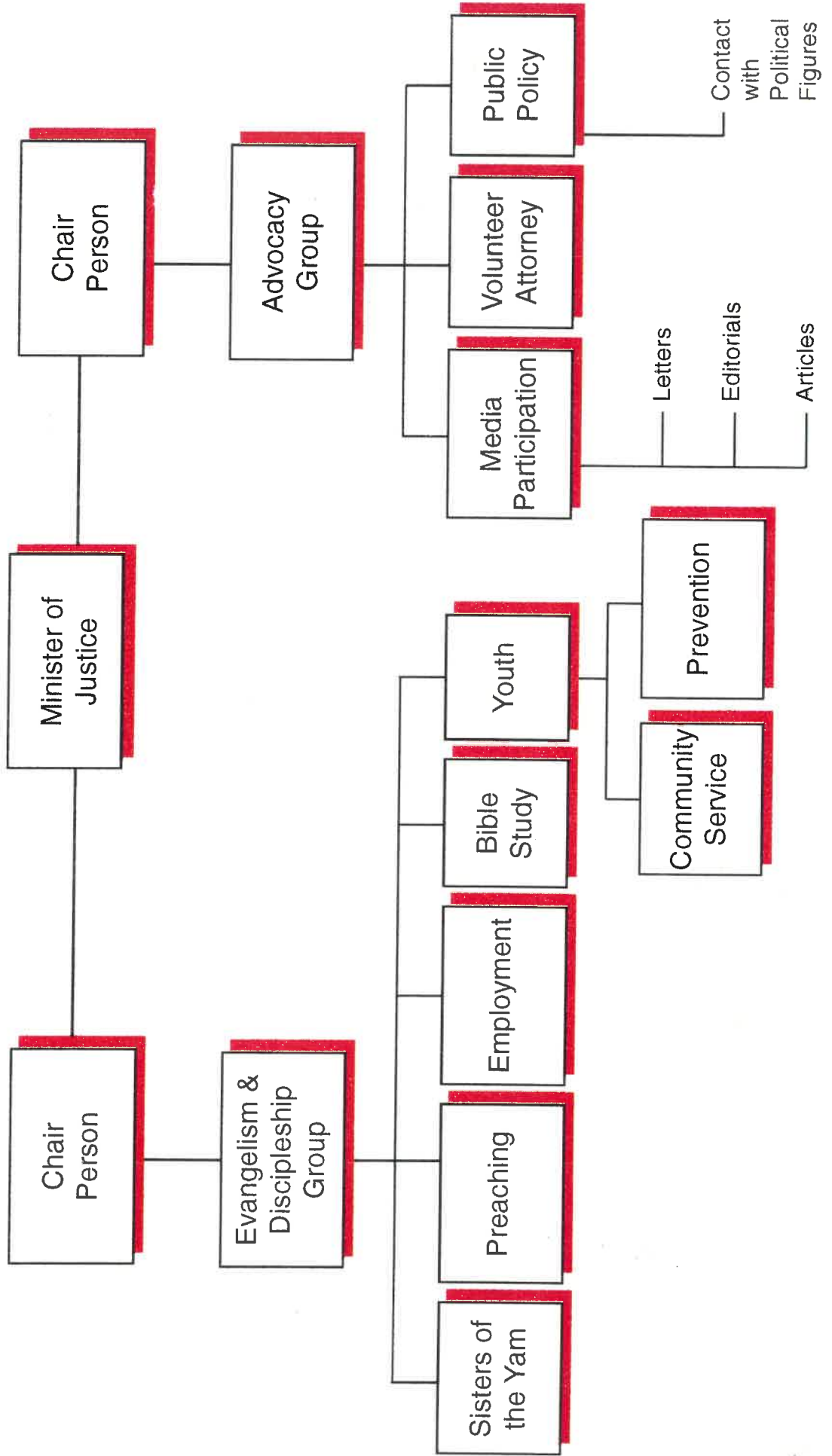
11. Approx. Salary/Honorarium: not applicable

12. Benefits to Person Responsible: The challenge of this position will be to depart in an exciting and growing need of the community to the church; the person will find great satisfaction and joy, because people will be helped to come to Christ and to re-establish their relationships with the church.

New Faith Prison Ministry

Evangelism & Discipleship

Philemon Society



Date: August 8, 1995

To: Rev. Richard M. Bundy

From: Denise C. Redick



Subject: **JOLIET STATE CORRECTIONAL CENTER
WORSHIP SERVICE EXPERIENCE**

My experience while visiting the above-mentioned prison was one that is difficult to put into words because of the deep, emotional and spiritual feeling witnessed. Nonetheless, in an attempt to explain my feelings as best I can, I must say that being a part of the worship services at the prison was one in which the most down-to-earth feeling was conveyed. I believe myself and every person from New Faith who attended the services were more blessed than the prisoners ever could have been. You see, the atmosphere was one without a facade, yet with a true focus on life and the spirituality of God who forgives us all. There was no difference made between the prisoners and us from New Faith--each person was clear and open to the prisoners that we all fall short of the glory of God and that we too had made and continue to make mistakes. However, we were openly honest with the prisoners that had it not been for the grace of God, we too might certainly be in their shoes--but, no blame was pointed at them.

I believe that the prisoners felt that we from New Faith were there because we wanted to be there and that we believed in God enough to want to share Him with them. For me particularly, I felt so blessed to be a part of the worship experience--the calm atmosphere, the open ears from the pews and the general truly, sincere participation from the prisoners, (Black and white), who even did a solo together while another prisoner played the piano. This picture was a welcome sight to witness: different skin colors accepting one another and harmonizing together inside prison walls, although unfortunately not on our daily streets we walk.

Overall, the worship experience with the prisoners was almost as rewarding, if not more so, than the one at my own church, where the congregation (myself included) many times tend to put on the facade that looks good (we smile, dress nicely and act as if our lives are perfect), in fear of letting the real truth be known.